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**"Soft she withdrew:"**

**Separation and Self-determination**

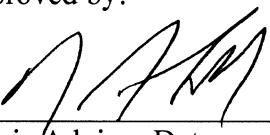
**in**


**Milton's *Paradise Lost***

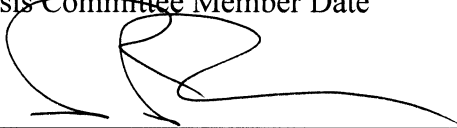
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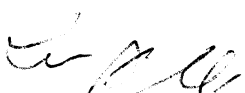
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“Soft she withdrew:”  
Separation and Self-determination  
in  
Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

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English 6030

Thesis on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

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## *Introduction*

While John Milton's epoch was dominated by religious fervor and ongoing attempts to redefine Christianity, his epic, *Paradise Lost*, is dominated by his own religious fervor and his attempts to define Christianity as a religion of free will. Ostensibly a religious poem, Milton's epic expansion of the Christian creation story is also a consolidation of his thoughts on all matters personal, political, and theological, which can be distilled down to the idea that, "Man is the occasion of his owne miseries" (The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce 934).<sup>1</sup> In addition to its theological underpinnings, *Paradise Lost*, originally published in 1667, not long after the 1660 restoration of the English Monarchy, incorporates a veiled manifesto of republican political ideology, as well a suggestive primer on marriage and personal relations. The common thread that runs through all of Milton's personal, political, and theological thinking is the importance of self-determination. Milton's chief concern with his poem is the assertion that free will is an integral part of Christianity, that free will existed in the Garden of Eden and continues to exist up to the present as an essential part of what it means to be human, and that everything good that the Christian God stands for is based in his gift of free will. *Paradise Lost* is Milton's declaration that in all things self-determination is both morally right as well as practically necessary in order to authenticate an individual's behavior as what they intended it to be. It is his declaration that to be truly responsible for one's actions, one must be free to choose those actions, or

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from *Paradise Lost* are from the *Riverside Milton*, which follows the 1674 text, divided into twelve books rather than ten. For further explication, please refer to the headnote on p. 327 regarding the text of *Paradise Lost*. All citations of Milton's other writings are also from the *Riverside Milton*.

to choose to have acted otherwise. Furthermore, he declares that freedom of the will is the way of the world; it is the way God planned it, and the way God wants it to be.

*Paradise Lost*, in addition to being an expansion upon the creation story, is also Milton's interpretation of scripture which emphasizes spiritual themes such as the beneficence and mercy of God and the redemption of humanity through the sacrifice of His son. Albert Labriola maintains that,

as a biblical epic, *Paradise Lost* is an interpretation of Scripture: a selection of biblical events, their design and integration according to dominant spiritual themes.... Imprinted in the epic are Milton's personal circumstances...goodness in the cyclical panorama of history will have its spokesperson and, ultimately, will prevail. (181)

But while there are numerous spiritual themes that Milton emphasizes in *Paradise Lost*, the dominant spiritual theme that dictates his selection of events and their integration into the fabric of the design of *Paradise Lost* is the central importance of free will. He uses his epic to aver that the triumph of goodness is dependent upon the self-determination of each individual, because without it there can be no authentic goodness. Mankind and free will are as wedded together as Adam and Eve, and all the good that happens to mankind as well as all the justice he may receive flow through God's gift of self-determination.

As an interpretation of scripture, *Paradise Lost* includes embellishments as well as outright alterations to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, expanding what had originally been a few pages in the Book of Genesis to encompass much of the twelve books of Milton's epic poem. As Rachel Trubowitz states, "free will [is] the core principle of the poet's ethics and politics" (388), and Milton's selection of events from

the Bible, the original story as well as the alterations he made to the original story, serve to emphasize what he saw as the spiritual theme of personal liberty, self-determination, or what will henceforth be referred to most often as free will. This theme of free will permeates Milton's epic because his interpretations of scripture, the panorama of history, and the goodness of God are all dependent upon it. Milton places the idea of humanity being possessed of free will at the center of his epic and as the very core principle built by God into human nature:

I form'd them free, and free they must remain,  
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change  
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree  
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd  
Thir freedom. (3.124-8)

*Paradise Lost* presents the argument that mankind is created as free—formed and ordained as such by God—an eternal, unchangeable part of the nature of mankind. It is the quality of freedom that gives meaning to any action or sentiment such as obedience, worship, or love. The separation scene between Adam and Eve which takes place in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost* is the most significant alteration that Milton makes to the original Biblical story. In the book of Genesis Adam and Eve are together when tempted by Satan with the fruit (Gen. 3:5-6), whereas in *Paradise Lost*, Milton has altered the circumstances of the temptation by separating the pair and having Eve alone be directly tempted by Satan, and Adam in turn tempted by Eve. By doing so, Milton is able to hold Adam and Eve individually responsible for their actions and to challenge the increasingly popular notion of predestination that had permeated the theology of much of Protestant

Christianity of his day. The separation scene in *Paradise Lost* is best understood as illustrative of Milton's commitment to the concept of free will, a concept that he believed pervades all of human life from cradle to grave, and holds a place of importance in all of humanity's relations.

The separation scene also affords Milton the opportunity to explore more fully Adam and Eve's individual culpability for the fall, and to examine the customary accusations of uxoriousness and vanity that the blurred lines of their responsibility have engendered over the years. Milton's thought about free will as it pertains to Eve in particular and women in general is seemingly conflicted, and despite his apparent attempts to do so, he never quite resolved the implications that Eve's free will would have upon the subordinate stature of women, and the degree to which they were permitted to make use of the free will that they were supposedly entitled to as part of God's creation of humanity. Milton had a relatively enlightened attitude regarding the treatment of women compared to the general tenor of his time, but, despite having approached an ideal of equality, he was not able to shed the prevailing zeitgeist and fully embrace a reappraisal of womankind's place in the world, choosing instead to maintain the masculine hegemony which was endorsed by his religion and culture.

## ***Milton's God***

The invocation to *Paradise Lost* declares Milton's primary purpose to be theodicy: to "assert Eternal Providence, /And justify the wayes of God to men" (1.25-6). The ways of God with regard to His treatment of humanity differ from the prelapsarian world to the postlapsarian. In the prelapsarian world of Milton's epic, the "wayes of God"

are fairly uncomplicated and can be reduced to His desire to be worshiped freely and unreservedly by humanity, out of love rather than any compulsion or reason:

Our voluntarie service he requires,  
 Not our necessitated, such with him  
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how  
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve  
 Willing or no, who will but what they must  
 By Destinie, and can no other choose? (5.529-34)

It is the voluntary quality of service that is precious to Milton's God, who therefore invests humanity with the quality of free will so that any worship offered to Him can be unquestionably free of compulsion or ratiocination—so that, just as "Heav'n's free Love" (4.68) is extended to humanity, any love humanity might extend to God in return is free love, not compulsory. The quality of voluntariness is intimately involved with the concept of free will, and plays a large role in Milton's view of the world. Hearts not free can be neither credited nor blamed for their actions because, good or bad, not free, their actions are not their own.

*Paradise Lost* first introduces the idea of freedom of the will and its particular importance in hell which is populated with those who were the first to exercise it to their own detriment and thereby lose their share of paradise. According to Satan, free will was the second creation of God: "Mee though just right, and the fixt Laws of Heav'n/ Did first create your Leader, next free choice" (2.18-9). And while it is true that, as Peter Lindenbaum states, "Satan is hardly a figure whose words or opinions we can accept without careful examination" (283), it seems that this particular statement of Satan's, if it

does not depict the order of God's creation accurately, may nonetheless reflect Milton's creative process as Satan and free will are among the most important subjects in his poem. Free will is mentioned a second time in Hell when its demonic denizens await the return of Satan from his initial journey to Eden; while waiting, the fallen angels loll about their residence and cogitate upon their Creator, the mixed blessing of the free will that He has provided to them, and His foreknowledge of their fate. They know not what to make of it:

Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,  
 In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high  
 Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,  
 Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,  
 And found no end, in wandring mazes lost. (2.557-61)

The fallen Angels were neither the last to be baffled by the gift of free will nor the last to be ensnared in the trap of responsibility that it carries with it. The gift of free will is not easily understood and did not always turn out well for those so-gifted, and, while Satan's reliability as a source of information about what transpired in heaven is open to question, it is significant that Milton has the first mention of the subject of free will broached by Satan, when he speaks of "the unconquerable will" (1.106), as it was a subject that had been bedeviling the ease of the religious for some time. God's naming of "the high Decree / Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd / Thir freedom" (3.126-8) tends to afford some support for Satan's pronouncement about the birth date of that decree as well, as Milton likely would not have used the word "Eternal" casually. Satan's free and



“unconquerable will” was eternal and among “the fixt Laws of Heav’n” even though his status among God’s favorites was not.

The significance of these mentions of free will from hell may rest in the warning that they provide that even though free will is an important component of the nature of rational beings, it is free of neither responsibility nor consequence. The fate of Satan and the other fallen angels serves as a cautionary tale that free will is not to be taken lightly. Free will does afford the opportunity to act contrary to God’s behests, but does not relieve the responsibility to behave obediently or, as Satan discovered to his eternal dismay, the dire consequences of the choice to disobey. In a rational world, only those who are free can be held responsible for their actions, because only the free could have acted differently than they did. This distinction is perhaps the most crucial to the understanding of Milton’s view of the loss of paradise. To iterate his position fully, he has Abdiel chastise Satan for confounding obedience with servitude:

Unjustly thou deprav’st it with the name  
 Of Servitude to serve whom God ordains,  
 Or Nature; God and Nature bid the same,  
 When he who rules is worthiest, and excels  
 Them whom he governs. This is servitude,  
 To serve th’ unwise, or him who hath rebelld  
 Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,  
 Thy self not free, but to thy self enthrall’d.  
 Yet leudly dar'st our ministring upbraid.  
 Reign thou in Hell thy Kingdom, let mee serve

In Heav'n God ever blest, and his Divine

Behests obey, worthiest to be obey'd. (6.174-85)

Abdiel points out Satan's error in mistaking obedience for servitude. He maintains that it is natural to follow those who are worthy of being followed, and it is unnatural to follow those who are unworthy. According to Abdiel, obedience is the natural state when the worthy, such as God or His Son, lead. Only when the unworthy such as Satan lead does obedience become servitude. Abdiel is happy to obey God because God is worthy to be obeyed. Unlike servitude, obedience is a natural and happy state, and an exercise of the free will, chosen freely by those who wish to obey. But when Abdiel points out that to obey who or what is worthy of obedience is to act in accord with God and nature, Milton's reasoning leads to paradoxical conclusions, raising questions regarding the status of women in general, and Eve in particular.

God's gift of Eve to Adam renders her status as a self-determined individual open to question. Her own free will cannot be considered unfettered if she belongs to Adam. God expects that Eve will obey Adam willingly because of his worthiness to be obeyed, an expectation that saddles Eve with a qualification to her putative free will which can hardly be called free when burdened with such expectations. God also further complicates Eve's situation when He impugns Adam's worthiness to be obeyed, when after the fall he asks Adam:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey

Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide,

Superior, or but equal, that to her

Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood, and the Place

Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
 And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd  
 Hers in all real dignitie: Adorn'd  
 She was indeed, and lovely to attract  
 Thy Love, not thy Subjection, and her Gifts  
 Were such as under Government well seem'd,  
 Unseemly to beare rule, which was thy part  
 And person, hadst thou known thy self aright. (10.145-56)

God takes a perplexing position here. He has disparaged Adam and cast aspersions toward Eve. He questions Adam's ability to lead as well as Eve's ability to be led. He has set Adam above Eve, but then denigrates the validity of that position. He expects Eve to obey him who is worthy to be obeyed, but then questions that worthiness. His own definition of humanity includes self-determination—"Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose" (3.122-3), but Eve, created for Adam, adorned to attract him, far excelled by him in dignity, and in need of government, can hardly be said to be free if she must brook all these restraints, and can hardly be said to be human if she lacks the free will to refuse the bridle. Damned if she follows Adam and damned if she does not, thus rendering God's own pronouncements about what constitutes a human moot, rather than "eternal" and "unchangeable."

### ***Obedience & Free Will***

Before the fruit of the tree of knowledge had imbued Adam and Eve with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, Milton's God placed obedience in the

preeminent position among virtues and disobedience among sins: “Wouldst thou approve thy constancy, approve / First thy obedience” (9.367-8). God asked only obedience of His human creations, nothing more.

Before He put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden He put the tree there, the tree whose fruit bore the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, and He forbade them nothing but the tree:

God hath pronounc't it death to taste that Tree,  
The only sign of our obedience left  
Among so many signes of power and rule  
Conferd upon us, and Dominion giv'n (4.427-30 )

The tree was the sole signifier of their obedience. Milton thought that obedience was so important to prelapsarian God that the first sentence of the argument to the first Book of *Paradise Lost* refers to “the whole Subject, Mans disobedience.” Obedience is thereby shown to be more important than right and wrong, which was a subject that Adam and Eve were forbidden to pursue by virtue of the proscription of the tree of knowledge. The only rule presented to the pair in Eden is to refrain from eating the fruit of that tree, so eating the fruit is the only opportunity that Adam and Eve are provided with to transgress: “God so commanded, and left that Command / Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live / Law to our selves, our Reason is our Law” (9.652-4). God wants their obedience because it is the outward sign of their love; it is the sign that the love they hold for God and that God holds for them in return matters more to them than anything else.

Obedience is the sign – nay the guarantor – of the voluntary nature of their service, that hearts free to do otherwise obey anyhow—not due to reason or rationale, but

as a function of unreserved love: “freely we serve / Because we freely love” (5.537-8). Those who have fallen—formerly angels, now demons—have fallen due to disobedience – “And Som are fall’n, to disobedience fall’n” (5.540) – no other cause is mentioned nor reason given because there is no other reason, nor need for any. Barbara Lewalski agrees, maintaining that “Milton treats the conditions of prelapsarian human life [in *De Doctrina*] in terms directly relevant to his epic. He asserts that Adam and Eve were bound only by the natural moral law and a single positive law, the divine prohibition against eating the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” (429). The only direct prelapsarian prohibition is the tree of knowledge; their only opportunity to sin is in eating the prohibited fruit, because that is the only restriction, “Sole Daughter of his voice,” they have been given that can be disobeyed. It is not the fruit that is important but the prohibition. It is God’s method of determining that the obedience to His directive is as important to Adam and Eve as it is to Him.

Disobedience is repugnant to Milton’s God because it shows a fundamental mistrust of God; it demonstrates a lack of trust that God knows how to best serve man’s interests or perhaps that He even knows what those interests are. Disobedience thus becomes a compounded sin: it is blasphemy, faithlessness, arrogance, even perhaps greed and lust, all rolled into one. Stanley Fish postulates that “at some level of generality, all values are one” (336), and he catalogues the virtues of obedience: “Heroism is obedience: an entire book is devoted to that equation . . . Knowledge is obedience . . . Wisdom is obedience. Paradoxically, freedom (liberty) is obedience because true freedom is the freedom to follow the best, while freedom from God is servitude” (332). Obedience is all virtues rolled into one, but without freedom of choice, obedience is compulsion, and

compulsion is the responsibility of the compeller not the compelled, so compulsory virtues are not virtues at all. Fish further postulates that “the decision of an absolutely free will cannot be determined by forces outside it” (346), so the decision to be obedient must be freely made in order to be commendatory; obedience without free will is meaningless, because obedience without the opportunity to disobey is mere coincidence.

The knowledge of the difference between good and evil contained in the fruit of the tree of knowledge is the seed of the fall of man. Satan wondered why this knowledge should be forbidden to Adam and Eve: “do they onely stand / By Ignorance, is that thir happie state, / The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?” (4.518-20). The answer to Satan’s question is of course ‘yes;’ they do stand only by ignorance. Ignorance is the proof of their obedience and their faith. Adam and Eve’s blissful state of ignorance is their protection against disobedience which is wrought of too much questioning, too much ratiocination. The “adoration pure / Which God likes best” (4.737-8) is not wrought of rational materials. It is the stuff of unadulterated love, and is corrupted by too much rationale. To Milton’s God, the show of obedience is more precious than any demonstration of mental acuity that his creations might display. Obedience is a show of unquestioning trust and love. Once a choice is governed by reason, then it loses its quality of obedience because it becomes a matter of self-interest. Possession of the knowledge of the distinction between good and evil changes the motivation for the choice and thus undermines the choice being made as a function of obedience—as God would wish it to be—and means that obedience has become the slave of reason rather than the harbinger of love. God wants his creations to choose to obey him out of love, simply

because that is what He has asked of them and that is what would please Him best, rather than because it suits them to do so. He wants His creations to want to please Him.

God's prohibition of the tree of knowledge as a source of food is based not on the importance of the fruit of that tree, or even the importance of the knowledge of good and evil, but on the need for there to be some form of prohibition so that the obedience that Adam and Eve paid to God would be demonstrably voluntary. Adam endeavors to explain the concept to Eve that any harm that can come to them will be a result of willful disobedience: "within himself / The danger lies, yet lies within his power: / Against his will he can receive no harme" (9.348-50). In Milton's prelapsarian Eden, to be safe from harm, mankind must only be obedient. As long as they choose to abide by the sole prohibition that God has made, they can do no wrong. Conversely, if there were nothing prohibited, they would be unable to do wrong; hence their doing right would be preordained and consequently neither meritorious nor meaningful. Thus God created free will and the prohibition as complementary components; there is no purpose to one without the other. For both Milton and his God, it is the ability to choose otherwise that gives meaning to choice, and it is the opportunity to make choices that is the necessary component to the establishment of free will. Being aware of the distinction between good and evil changes the fundamental quality of the motivation behind any choice or decision that is made thereafter. A choice made to obey before this knowledge appertains is a choice to trust in the providence of God, which is what God "loves best," whereas a choice made with the knowledge of good and evil changes the tenor of that decision to a form of enlightened self-interest which can no longer be considered "adoration pure." Nor can a choice governed solely by reason be trusted to be a right choice: "Since Reason

not impossibly may meet / Some specious object by the Foe suborn'd, / And fall into deception unaware," (9.360-2). Reason is subject to corruption and deception, but obedience is not. So for Milton the distinction between prelapsarian choice and postlapsarian is that for humanity prelapsarian choice is best left without recourse to reason or the knowledge of good and evil; postlapsarian choices are made with the help of reason and the knowledge of good and evil, which is intended to be a kind of helpmeet to the fallen mind, which needed no such help before the fall. Prelapsarian choice was between obedience and disobedience; postlapsarian choice is between right and wrong.<sup>2</sup> God forbade the fruit of the tree of knowledge because the knowledge of the distinction between good and evil will not be helpful to mankind in the prelapsarian decision-making process. Despite mankind's considerable rational abilities, the issue of right and wrong will only serve to cloud his judgment.

For the unfallen Adam and Eve, the choice may seem as if it is the choice between good and evil, but in paradise the wise use of choice is not between good and evil but between obedience and disobedience. Milton's position seems to be that—at least in the unfallen state—it behooves mankind to value obedience more highly than rationality because it is what God values most highly. The inadequacy of using reason to make decisions about obedience to God is spelled out more fully in *Areopagitica*, where Milton states that:

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<sup>2</sup> It should be acknowledged that it was not until after they had partaken of the fruit – after the fall – that Adam and Eve had the knowledge of the difference between good and evil, so that knowledge could not therefore have played any part in their decision to eat the fruit. They use reason presumably to arrive at their decisions to eat, and used it differently from one another, Eve seeking Godhead ("nor was God-head from her thought" (9.790)) or equality with Adam ("the more to draw his Love, / And render me more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undisable, sometime / Superior" (9.822-5)) and Adam, afraid of being deprived of Eve, seeking to seal their joint fate (And mee with thee hath ruind, for with thee / Certain my resolution is to Die" (9.906-7)), but knowledge of good and evil was not a part of that reasoning.



Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evill? (1006)

Milton takes the position in this passage that it is well-nigh impossible to make a correct choice rationally —“hardly to be discern'd” and “what wisdom can there be to choose” — and that it were better to merely be obedient. But Milton is here speaking of fallen humanity who must now resort to the dictates of reason as best they can— because in the fallen state, “Knowledge of Good [will be] bought dear by knowing ill” (4.222). Being fallen, it is too late to be simply obedient, so mankind, as he now is, must have recourse to the knowledge of the difference between good and evil/right and wrong to assist him in his decision making. Prelapsarian humanity however had the possibility of simple obedience without recourse to reason, and was thus better off. In the prelapsarian world, the use of rationality in the exercise of free will was more likely to cause harm than good. Preferring “adoration pure,” Milton’s God dismisses the vain and useless enterprise of the exercise of reason and its inadequacy as a guiding force for the will in the prelapsarian

world: “What pleasure I from such obedience paid, / When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice) / Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild, / Made passive both, had servd necessitie, / Not mee” (3.107-11). The use of reason in their choice of action served neither mankind nor the angels well, resulting in misbegotten choices where selfish motives were preferred over simple obedience, causing the fall of both mankind and angel.

Milton found the Calvinistic idea of predestination odious, and spent much of his later life debunking it on grounds both logical and practical. Although much of his writing touched upon the subject of predestination, *Paradise Lost* perhaps serves as the most trenchant example of his distaste for the concept. Throughout the epic poem, he avers that predestination can not be the way of the world and the world still be the work of a rational and benevolent God. The ability to reason is of little use and has small purpose if all outcomes are prearranged. Granted, it is difficult to explain how a God can be omniscient and still not know the future, but Milton works around this by expostulating that knowing the future and predetermining the future are not the same thing, and that free will and foreknowledge are not mutually exclusive: “if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less prov’d certain unforeknown” (3.117-9). Milton believes that there is a difference between what happens on its own and what God wills to happen, and it is in this gap that he builds his conception of free will. He also felt that time is subject to God’s will; that God created time, which is not eternal, and superimposed it over the preexisting cosmos, and thus He is not governed by the laws of time. If God’s omniscience predates the existence of time then God has known all things that would come to pass before they came to pass or even

before the principals had come into being, but he did not necessarily will whatever actions these principals may have performed. Thus knowing what would eventually happen did not necessarily mean that He caused it to happen or willed it to happen. God's omniscience is not subject to the constraints that time imposes upon other of his creations

### ***Personal Protestantism***

Milton's insistence on free will as an inherent part of human nature is a departure from the theology of the most prominent Protestant theologians of his epoch, and is indicative of Milton's movement away from mainstream Protestantism, and toward a personal religion to which he could more confidently commit himself. From the time Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg in 1517, the question of free will vs. predestination became one of the ongoing debates of the Protestant Reformation. Luther, the central figure of the Reformation who believed that free will was illusory, and Desiderius Erasmus, the famed Humanist and reform-minded Catholic who believed that free will was a necessary part of the definition of mankind, famously debated the subject in their correspondence, beginning nearly a century prior to Milton's birth. Georgia Christopher points out, "the difference between Catholic and Protestant traditions has often been located in the question of free will" (200), but as the devoted Protestant Milton's support of the concept of free will demonstrates, this is not always the case.

Milton was not a doctrinaire Protestant. His form of personal Protestantism permitted him to reject those doctrines which he did not find suitable. This is where Milton drove his wedge between the principles of prescience and predetermination. He believed that omniscience and free will could peacefully coexist, a premise long-since

embraced by the Catholic Church, and thus increasingly likely to be declared anathema by the Protestants, and as a matter of personal conscience and his interpretation of scripture he came to believe in the existence of free will. James Turner comments that Milton had a “complex relation to contemporary Protestantism” (79), and perhaps the greatest complicating factor was Milton’s opinion of the matter of free will. A tendency toward biblical literalism led the adherents of many Protestant denominations such as Lutherans and Calvinists to believe that God’s omniscience presupposed predestination, which thereby precluded the possibility of self-determination. But unlike many of the Protestants in his day, Milton was not a biblical literalist, and as can be seen from “his attacks on literalistic biblical exegesis” (Lewalski 155), he did not believe that the Bible was the infallible word of God. According to Lewalski, “Milton could escape the constraints of biblical literalism in treating his subject because . . . he gave the indwelling spirit of God priority over the letter of scripture, insisting that the meaning of any scripture text must accord with the dictates of reason and the overarching precept of charity” (476). The absence of biblical literalism distinguished Milton from many of the Protestants of his day, and his confidence in the rationality and beneficence of God led to the formation of his stance on free will. Diane McColley confirms Milton’s non-literalist position: “Milton believed that the Bible was true, but that the individual conscience guided by the Holy Spirit had a good deal of leeway in interpreting it, measured always by the rule of charity: trust in the goodness of God and commitment to the well-being of humankind” (“Milton and the Sexes” 151). To Milton, the truth of the Bible was not in the literal and legalistic interpretation of its words, but in the unerring sentiments that are expressed in those words. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton draws a “remarkable portrait of a

rational God, so very different from the Calvinist arbitrary deity whose reasons and will are unfathomable” (Lewalski 170). To Milton, what is most important in the Bible is the rationality and beneficence of God that shine through the text of the Bible; he had little use for the biblical literalist’s habit of attempting to parse particular phrases for their potential use as a premise for a law, principle, or adage. It is this lack of biblical literalism and faith in the spirit of the Bible that makes it possible for Milton to expand upon and alter the original story without fear of offending his God. Milton’s theological inclinations permitted him to alter the details of the Biblical story because he believed that he was remaining true to the spirit of the text, and the spirit of the text is the source for his theodicy and the basis of his theology.

Over the intervening centuries since the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s precise theology has proven notoriously difficult to pin down. In his introduction to *Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis wrote that “Milton’s thought, when purged of its theology, does not exist” (64), and one certainly cannot give a complete accounting of *Paradise Lost* without taking that theology into account. Milton’s theology was in more or less constant flux throughout his life, and by the time he finished *Paradise Lost*, did not coincide with the dogma of any established religious denomination. As a result of his personal and ever-evolving theology and his politics which were often of a somewhat radical bent, it behooved him at times to avoid confirming what others may have thought of him. He often disagreed with the mainstream Protestant beliefs of his contemporaries, and the use of what Thomas Fulton called “negative representation” (202), a kind of habit of obfuscation, likely spared him from constantly having to defend his often controversial beliefs. As he matured, he had come to reject the notion of predestination, in opposition

to the doctrines of Luther and Calvin. He also seemed, later in life, to have adopted the controversial Arian stance that the Son of God was subordinate to the Father, thus discounting the widely accepted Christian postulation of the “Holy Trinity.” Such a position would have doubtless been denounced as heretical in Milton’s time, and subjected him to vilification, which may well account for his apparent reluctance to embrace it publicly.

As a younger man, some of Milton’s writings were somewhat radical compared to the commonplace views of others, and he was denounced almost routinely. Despite their basis in serious biblical exegesis and religious devotion, he “was widely accused of . . . [libertinism] . . . because of his divorce tracts” (Stapleton 85). Milton was a man who highly valued freedom of thought and expression (as evidenced by *Areopagitica*), and despite being variously vilified throughout his life for one thing or another, he did not abandon his principles, being disinclined to allow any sect to dictate to him what constituted acceptable belief:

Milton was continuously at battle with the mechanisms of prohibition which sought (often quite inconsistently) to define the limits of what was printable: in spite of a Licensing Order of 1643, for example, Milton refused to obtain a license to publish divorce tracts, and wrote a major polemic against licensing. Shortly thereafter, perhaps in part because the extremists included his views among the heresies that deserved persecution, Milton retreated from print culture to write several texts

including some that would remain in manuscript until after his death.<sup>3</sup>

(Fulton 202)

Perhaps wearied from public combat with regard to his writings, he may have withdrawn from the field of battle, but was loath to capitulate in his thinking. His reasoning in favor of the right to divorce, for instance, is based on thinking far removed from the libertinism he was accused of, and the calumny of his detractors in all likelihood drove him to retreat further from any formal religious affiliation into his own more personalized form of worship. Shawcross said of Milton, “though he seems to accept Presbyterianism for a while, he later rejects it; though he seems influenced by the Independents and their Arminian stance, he does not become a thorough Independent or Arminian” (31). He seems to be continually searching for answers that he can commit to both intellectually as well as spiritually, and those answers offered by these religious sects never seem to hold his attention or commitment for long, and his ongoing pursuit of answers to theological questions always seems to return to his own exegesis as the only kind he is willing to trust. Thus, by the time of his writing of *Paradise Lost*, he is no longer affiliated with any religious denomination, and seems satisfied to formulate his own form of religious observation without feeling a need to accommodate himself to the constraints of any denominational affiliation. Fulton confirms Milton’s lack of a formal religious affiliation: “famously, he seldom mentions sects by name, and after his explicit break with the Presbyterians in the mid-1640’s, he does not assign to himself any sectarian identity” (202). He was wont to pick and choose the principles in which he believed based upon how well they suited his thinking, and gave little consideration to how his beliefs were

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<sup>3</sup> This might help to explain why *De Doctrina Christiana* was never published.

received by others; and by the time he wrote *Paradise Lost*, his most pronounced disagreement was on the subject of free will— with Presbyterians, Puritans, or anyone who might espouse the doctrine of predestination.

Affiliating oneself with a particular sect tends to foster a fanaticism and certitude which would not have come naturally to the ever-evolving Milton, and would have forced him into at least some degree of capitulation to what other churchmen considered as established principles. Within these fast-forming Protestant sects of his day, the formation of codified ideologies and a tendency toward ossification of their tenets of belief would sometimes lead to hasty accusations of deviant or heretical beliefs, an unpleasant circumstance which he had already experienced and was doubtless in no hurry to repeat. Milton's form of personal religion was based in what Maria Magro refers to as the "Protestant belief in the predominance of the individual conscience in matters of spiritual welfare over any state or ecclesiastical coercion, and the Protestant emphasis on interpreting scripture for oneself" (103), and to align himself with any denomination would have tended to undermine Milton's reliance on the individual conscience and personal scriptural interpretation. Evidently unconvinced by Protestant theologians that predestination is an unassailable conclusion to be drawn from sound scriptural exegesis, Milton attempts in *Paradise Lost* to impugn the concept of predestination by portraying free will as a gift from a beneficent God, included in the very conception of the nature of humanity. He endeavors to show that humanity's love for God must necessarily be voluntary for it to be genuine and meaningful, "for how / Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve / Willing or no?" The essence of voluntariness is free will. To Milton, God's justice is likewise dependent upon free will. *Paradise Lost* depicts a beneficent



God (“That thou art happie, owe to God” (5.520)), who is just (Not just, not God” (9.701)), and not arbitrary. In order that the reward and punishment doled out by God be just and not arbitrary, it must be merited, deserved by the individual, and commensurate with the acts involved. Therefore, the actions to be rewarded or punished must be voluntary because it would be unjust to reward or punish behavior undeservedly. Stanley Fish points out that “by punishing man, God accords him the respect due a free agent, and is therefore just” (255). The justice flows from mankind’s status as free agent, which is God’s way of showing respect for humanity. God will allow mankind to earn his destiny rather than predestine him, and in turn, the love that mankind accords to God will be the voluntary love that He craves, for love “necessitated, such with him / Finds no acceptance, nor can find” (5.530-1). This voluntary love is what Milton sees at the heart of the relationship between God and humankind, and the subsequent mutual respect and just desert are a function of the free agency that God has granted to mankind and cannot exist without it.

While Milton’s epic poem certainly promotes the centrality of free will, Milton seems to have been little interested in using *Paradise Lost* to respond directly or specifically to Luther or Calvin, preferring to address the concept of predestination itself rather than any of its particular proponents. Christopher writes that Milton “usually he did not speak of *the* Reformation” (her emphasis) and “did not consider Luther’s break with Rome to be the important watershed in western history it is now regarded . . . [and] saw the work of reformation as a recurring task” (197). To Milton, reformation was not just a one-time reordering of priorities, but an ongoing responsibility of the faithful, involving a lifetime of contemplation and vigilance. Milton himself lived this lifelong reformation,

continuing to evolve and adapt his religious beliefs throughout his lifetime as his conscience and contemplation called for it. He had been “at least nominally a predestinarian Calvinist” (Lewalski 122), but he did not swallow whole the Calvinist doctrine served to him from the pulpit, but chose rather to ruminate the theological cud<sup>4</sup> as “he departs from the usual Calvinist insistence on God’s control of individual lives [and] history” (Lewalski 122). He continued to consider his beliefs critically throughout his life while attempting to account for their ramifications and implications and how they fit into his understanding of his life and his God, and eventually concludes that the principle of predestination does not fit his understanding.

As a result of this adjustment in his thinking, *Paradise Lost* is somewhat dismissive of the arguments against free will. Milton has God repeatedly assert that free will is an inherent part of the nature of rational beings, included at their creation; twice during his discourse with the Son in book 3: “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. / Such I created all th’ Ethereal Powers” (3.99-100). And again several lines later:

I formd them free, and free they must remain,  
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change  
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree  
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain’d  
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain’d thir fall. (3.124-8)

And then in Book 5: “And good he made thee, but to persevere / He left it in thy power, ordaind thy will / By nature free, not over-rul’d by Fate” (5.525-7). Milton sees free will as an essential part of human nature, as well as the nature of his other rational creations, Angels. The free will that these rational creations possess serves to exonerate God from

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<sup>4</sup> Alimentary metaphors with thanks to Minaz Jooma.

the responsibility for their actions, and puts the onus on the rational creatures themselves. But they are therefore required to make their own decisions, and are thus capable of deciding incorrectly or contrary to God's wishes (though not his will). Humans can and will enthrall themselves, as did some of the Angels, and it will be their own fault, and they will have consequences to face, and yet as a result of facing those consequences, will still have a possibility of redemption.

Because time is His own creation, the future and the past do not restrict Milton's God in the way that they do humanity. He is able to see what will occur in the future just as He can see what has happened in the past, without necessarily having willed these things to have happened. This separation of events into two kinds, those which God has willed to occur and those that have occurred without His having willed them, is similar to Milton's separation of sin into two component parts: "Each type of sin . . . has two subdivisions . . . the will to do evil, and the evil deed itself" (*On Christian Doctrine* 1191). In addition to the event itself, destiny must, in addition to the actual occurrence of an event, include God's will that an event occur for that event to be considered destined. God is only responsible for the events that he specifically wills to happen<sup>5</sup>: "if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown." This is how free will and prescience can for Milton live side by side. Milton's God presents mankind with the choices, but does not make the choices for him. This is the point where Milton addresses the "predestinarians" most directly, drawing the distinction between knowledge and destiny (prescience and predestination). He maintains that God is able to separate what He knows from what He wills, and that

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<sup>5</sup> So perhaps there is no special providence in the fall of a sparrow, at least not every sparrow.

only what He wills is destiny. Not everything that happens is willed by God to happen; some things He merely permits to happen.

### *Arianism*

Milton's personalized religion and lack of denominational affiliation did not shield him from periodic vilification. He was accused of heresy while living (Fulton 32) as well as after his death. The particular heresy of which he has been accused and perhaps the most controversial aspect of Milton's personal theology as it pertains to *Paradise Lost* is that of Arianism. Arianism is an ancient theological position which was adjudged a heresy by the Catholic Church a few hundred years after the death of Christ, and mainstream Protestant Churches did not counter that judgment. The accusation of heresy against Milton was founded in his apparent acceptance of the Arian precept that the Son of God was subordinate to God. Milton stated in *Tetrachordon*, published in 1645, "God is the head of Christ" (1030). This precept ran counter to mainstream Christianity's traditional and widely accepted conception of the "Holy Trinity" which postulated a divine triumvirate of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost who were all immortal, eternal, and of essentially equal status. Although, a few years later, in *Eikonoklastes*, published in 1649, Milton called Arianism a heresy referring to the "Arian and Pelagian heresies" (1089); thus exhibiting the protean quality to his theology that would remain to some degree for the rest of his lifetime. As a more mature man, perhaps as a result of "a development in Milton's thought" (Lewalski 170), he seems to have more fully embraced

the Arian subordination of the Son to the Father, at least where *Paradise Lost* was concerned.<sup>6</sup>

The justification of the ways of God is the stated mission of *Paradise Lost*, and a rational God is more easily justified than an arbitrary deity, not just from a theological standpoint, but from an artistic standpoint as well. Any creation myth needs to maintain a degree of plausibility to gain acceptance from its intended audience. As a creation myth, the story of *Paradise Lost* needs to make sense, to be rational, because the God that Milton wished to portray was rational. Arianism's demotion of the Son from equal with God to subordinate status is based in the reasoning that the Son of God was created by God the Father and consequently after the Father, and therefore would not exist if not for that act of creation by God; the Son has existed for something less than eternity because there was a time when God existed, but that His Son did not. The accusation of Arianism against Milton's *Paradise Lost* stems primarily from his attempt to establish that the Son volunteered of His own free will to expiate the sins of humanity. Milton wished to emphasize the heroic character of the Son, and according to Lewalski, "Milton's Arianism allows him to portray the Son as a genuinely dramatic and heroic character, whose choices are made and whose actions are taken freely, in a state of imperfect knowledge" (473). It is precisely the voluntary nature of these actions that imbues them with their heroic character. If the Son were not an entity separate from God, His act of volunteerism would have been an empty solipsistic gesture. It is the presence of free will and the absence of predestination that makes this volunteerism, and thus the heroism,

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<sup>6</sup> There is also some considerable indication of Arianism in *De Doctrina Christiana*, but given the controversy of its authorship, it will not be addressed here.

possible, otherwise it is merely all a part of a preordained, fated plan, and fate does not create heroes; choice does.

The voluntary nature of the Son's sacrifice is emphasized in several passages of *Paradise Lost* which Milton uses to paint the portrait of the Son's heroism that is so important to the poem. In turn, these passages reflect the sentiments found in Raphael's pronouncement to Adam about the importance to God of the voluntary nature of an act and the favor that it finds with Him, and conversely the emptiness of any service governed by destiny and not choice:

Our voluntarie service he requires,  
 Not our necessitated, such with him  
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how  
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve  
 Willing or no, who will but what they must  
 By Destinie, and can no other choose? (5.529-34)

The voluntary nature of the Son's actions in turn reflect the Arian precepts that Milton has adopted for his poem because the voluntariness presupposes that he be an entity separate from the Father—born after the Father, created by the Father and subordinate to the Father.

The importance of the Son's heroism to the poem is echoed in the importance to the Father of the voluntariness of the Son's actions. Milton repeatedly uses the word "freely" in describing the Son's actions, which in turn seem designed to curry favor with the Father. The Book 3 Argument overtly states that "*The Son of God freely offers himself a Ransome for Man*" (415) (Milton's italics), a phrase which seems to orbit around the

word “freely”; the Son reinforces that voluntary element in the rhetoric of his offer to the Father, and again uses the word “freely”:

Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life

I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;

Account mee man; I for his sake will leave

Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee

Freely put off, and for him lastly dye

Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage. (3. 236-41)

Like the previous passage, this one also serves to emphasize the heroic and voluntary qualities of the son, but the separateness of the Son and the Son's subordination are manifested in the beseeching tone of the Son toward the Father, and in Milton's use of some particular language that emphasizes the nature of the Son as discrete from and subordinate to the Father. The separateness of the Son from the Father is established most overtly in the phrases: “on mee let thine anger fall” and “leave thy bosom,” while the heroic quality of the Son and his voluntary sacrifice for humanity are established in the phrases: “for his sake,” “and for him,” and “Freely put off.” The willingness of the Son to face death voluntarily and to freely put off the glory of residing in the presence of the Father for the sake of the redemption of mankind's sin can not be portrayed as heroic without the aspect of voluntariness, which can not exist without the Son's being self-determined. An individual commanded to take on a suicide mission against his will has not the heroic tenor of the one who volunteers to do so.

The Arian precept of the Son's subordination is also addressed pointedly in the following passage in which God speaks to the son's discrete creation as separate from, later than, and by the leave of the Father:

This day I have begot whom I declare  
 My onely Son, and on this holy Hill  
 Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
 At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;  
 And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow  
 All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord. (5.603-8)

This passage indicates the subordination of the Son in that the Father has begot (to bring into existence), anointed, and appointed Him, and also, in a somewhat backhanded fashion, in that the Father's pronouncement of the Son as "your Head" implies that it is the Father's prerogative to determine the limits of the Son's power.

Later, Milton further stresses the "voluntarie" aspect of the Son's redemption of humanity's sin as an important part of God's intent:

I intend  
 Mercie colleague with Justice, sending thee  
 Mans Friend his Mediator, his design'd  
 Both Ransom and Redeemer voluntarie,  
 And destin'd Man himself to judge Man fall'n. (10.58-62)

God here discusses that the Son was "design'd" as ransom and redeemer. The act of design requires that the designer be an entity separate from and exist before the designed. However, despite the inclusion of the word "voluntarie," Milton does somewhat confuse



the issue of free will when speaking of the Son's upcoming judgment of Adam and Eve, with his use of the word "destin'd" which might tend to impugn the assertion of the free will of the Son as, if he is "destin'd" to be Man and to judge Man, his "voluntarie service" seems less voluntary. It may be, however, that the temptation to juxtapose "design'd" and "destin'd" was too great for Milton to resist, and presumably as long as the verdict to be delivered by the Son is not predetermined then the charge of predestination may be averted. This passage also serves to reinforce the beneficence and rationality of God in that His intent is to have "Mercie colleague with Justice" in the judgment upon "Man." This brief passage also displays Milton's remarkable economy with words as there are nearly as many disparate ideas contained in this short passage as there are words. The Son's response to His Father also has implications of subordination when He says: "Father Eternal, thine is to decree, / Mine both in Heav'n and Earth to do thy will" (10.68-9). These passages all support the notion that Arianism played a substantial part in *Paradise Lost* by illustrating the separateness and subordination of the Father and the Son. They serve a purpose in aiding Milton to draw the picture of free will as a part of human nature and paint the portrait of a heroic act on the part of the Son, thus helping to establish Him as the epic hero of *Paradise Lost*.

Perhaps the best argument in support of Milton's use of the principles of Arianism in *Paradise Lost* is that it helps him to make sense of his creation story while also providing him with a way to establish his God as a rational one. Arianism contributes mightily to Milton's mission of theodicy in *Paradise Lost*, helping him to demonstrate the rational and beneficent God in which he believed. Labriola, addressing this topic, refers to it as:

a recurrent theme in Milton's major poems: the justification of God's ways to humankind. In *Paradise Lost* for example, the downfall of Adam and Eve and the introduction of sin and death into the human condition are interpreted from a providential perspective. From this vantage point, the deity is not vengeful but merciful, not misguided or blind but instrumental in humankind's ultimate triumph. (171)

For Milton to justify the ways of God, he must show that God's ways are just, that He acts rationally, mercifully, and lovingly. The introduction of the Arian precept of a subordinate Son of God provides Milton with a coherent way to do so, so that the actions of that God follow a rational progression and are not subject to arbitrary whims and incomprehensible episodes. The adoption of the principle of God's creation of the Son coming after His own creation enables Milton to justify the ways of God more satisfactorily to himself, and as an artist he would be hard-pressed to convince his readers to accept that which he does not himself believe.

Milton's first principle is his definition of God. Biblical literalists who use the words of the Bible to extrapolate a definition of God and God's ways have as their first principle the Bible, "the word of God," and they judge that if God said so and so in his book, which we deem to be his word, and therefore infallible, it can be extrapolated from this premise that certain other conclusions may be drawn. Their reasoning is syllogistic: If God is omniscient, He knows everything that will happen in the future; if everything that will happen in the future is known by God in advance, everything is predestined. But Milton's first principle is a definition of God—a God "not vengeful but merciful, not misguided or blind but instrumental in humankind's ultimate triumph"—not an

acceptance of the Bible as the unimpeachable word of God. Milton's God in *Paradise Lost* is merciful, beneficent, rational, and just. Free will is a conclusion that Milton has arrived at from the implications of these premises, not the premise upon which his conclusions are based. The status of the Son as subordinate to the Father is another conclusion based upon these premises.

Milton's God is not the God of Calvin, and He is not a God who is defined through literalist biblical exegesis. What is most important to Milton is not that the schema arrived at from extrapolation of biblical principles be found to be logically sound, but that the biblical principles be found to support the goodness of God. For Milton, the story that he wished to tell of mankind's sin and redemption required that mankind have free agency in order to justify God's treatment of humankind as deserving of his fate and worthy of his redemption, and the story of the heroism of the Son's sacrifice for humankind required that the Son be acting out of free will when He volunteers Himself for the redemption of humanity. In order for that gesture to have meaning, that it be heroic, it is imperative that the Son not be predestined to His role, but rather that He take it on as an example of His great love for God and humanity.

## ***Miltonic Marriage***

Milton's ideal of marriage is based on the marriage of Adam and Eve, formed throughout a lifetime of Biblical exegesis and contemplation, and informed by his lifelong fascination with Eve. According to Lewalski, Milton "spent his youth 'chastly' expecting to find in marriage his 'chiefest earthly comforts' and especially relief from 'unkindly solitarines'" (165) and "fantasizing about how wonderful marriage will be

when it happens for him, using the marriage of Adam and Eve as his fantasy model” (166). Milton’s youthful expectations were not fulfilled as he had hoped by his first marriage; his wife returned to her father shortly after the nuptials, and he consequently undertook a justification for divorce, but he did not abandon his idealistic view of marriage and its possibilities for delivering the ‘chiefest earthly comforts.’ Because their alliance was formed in the prelapsarian world, Milton believed “that there was a neerer alliance between *Adam* and *Eve*, then could be ever after between man and wife” (*Tetrachordon* 1035), but their marriage could still serve as an ideal for the rest of humanity as it did for him.

In extolling marriage, Milton speaks most often and most highly of the importance of “converse” and companionship as the most important components of any marriage, but there are other elements involved in a marriage that Milton found indispensable to its success. He felt that sexual relations were an integral part of marriage, but not the most important part. In *Paradise Lost*, the marriage of Adam and Eve included sex as an urgent element, consummated forthwith after their first meeting and abrupt marriage ceremony. According to McColley, Milton considered sex to be “a divine gift” (“Sexes”150). Although sex was an important part of Milton’s conception of marriage, he believed that “marriage is not a meer carnall coition, but a human Society” (948). His extensive writings in advocacy for the right to divorce were not based in any licentious inclinations, as his detractors proposed, nor on any disaffection toward marriage, but rather a reverence for its possibilities, and a reluctance to abandon those possibilities, to settle for a less than ideal marriage: “he I say who therefore seeks to part, is one who highly honours the married life, and would not stain it” (940). In *The Doctrine*

*and Discipline of Divorce*, he said that “in Gods intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and the noblest end of marriage” (938), and he goes on to explain the reason for the existence of marriage:

What is it then but that desire which God put into Adam in Paradise before he knew the sin of incontinence; that desire which God saw it was not good that man should be left alone to burn in; the desire and longing to put off an unkindly solitarines by uniting another body, but not without a fit soule to his in the cheerfull society of wedlock. Which if it were so needfull before the fall, when man was much more perfect in himselfe, how much more is it needfull now against all the sorrows and casualties of this life to have an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate in marriage. (939)

As it was for Adam, so it is for all who have followed him: the putting off of an “unkindly solitarines” is the chief aim of marriage, and converse with a ready and reviving associate is the most effective means to assuage this solitariness. To be married to an incompatible mate fails to accomplish that goal, and, in that that failure is contrary to God’s purpose, Milton believed that when a couple is incompatible, it would be in keeping with God’s intentions that the couple separate.

The general tenor of Milton’s writings on divorce is that if the purpose of marriage is to assuage loneliness, and it does not do so, then the marriage has no purpose and is best dissolved because “not to be belov'd & yet retain'd, is the greatest injury to a gentle spirit” (940). The “fit soule” manifested in the “intimate and speaking help [of] a ready and reviving associate” is the chief element of compatibility in the “cheerfull

society of wedlock.” Converse and not sexuality is Milton’s method that a couple uses to become ‘one flesh.’ Hannah Demaray argues that “while Milton may be of ‘two minds’ on the subject of women, he gives remarkable representation to the cohesive nature of ‘converse’ and ‘conversation’ in the divorce tracts and years later in the graceful exchanges of Eve and Adam” (24). Indeed Milton has displayed some confusion about and inability to resolve the status of women, seeming very much to be as Demaray says, of “two minds” on the subject; but he is quite unequivocal about the value women possess as a partner in converse. The cohesive nature of converse is the method for Adam and Eve to become of one mind and thus of one flesh.

Given Milton’s enthusiasm for the sexual component in marriage, there is the possibility that he has conflated the idea of congress with that of converse. While it seems possible if not likely that “converse” is a euphemism of sorts for sexual congress—the O.E.D even includes ‘intercourse’ among its roster of convivial synonyms<sup>7</sup>—there are indications that it is not. When speaking to God about his desire for a companion, Adam says, “in thee / Is no deficiencie found; not so is Man, / But in degree, the cause of his desire / By conversation with his like to help, / Or solace his defects” (8.415-9). Conversation is the way to help and solace, as opposed to the usual sexual suspects that are dismissed thusly by Milton: “that the dignity & blessing of mariage is plac’t rather in the mutual enjoyment of that which the wanting soul needfully seeks, then of that which the plenteous body would joyfully give away” (*Doctrine* 940). Surely what the plenteous

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<sup>7</sup> OED: converse: 1. a. Intercourse; = conversation n. 2, 3 Obs. exc. in certain expressions now referred to 3. 1610 J. Guillim Display of Heraldrie iii. vi. 103 The mutuall conuerse of humane Society. 1615 G. Sandys Relation of Journey i. 50 Enfeebled with the continual conuerse of women. 1646 Sir T. Browne Pseudodoxia Epidemica 378 By converse or copulation. 1653 H. More Antidote Atheism (1712) ii. iv. 51 Sociableness or love of Converse.

3. a. Familiar interchange of thoughts; discourse, talk; = conversation n.

body would joyfully give away are sexual favors, and Milton has here drawn a distinction between that and the blessing of marriage. There is more than one kind of mutual enjoyment for the married couple, and while the body and even perhaps the mind may seek gratification through sexual avenues, the soul 'needfully seeks' the mutual enjoyment of converse.

Milton attempted in *Tetrachordon* to define the ideal marriage, and in *Paradise Lost* he tried to describe it; what all the attempts to depict good marriage throughout his writing career have in common is the central importance of converse. Fellowship and converse are the aims of marriage, and the signifier of a good marriage; "that sociable and helpfull aptitude which God implanted between man and woman toward each other" (940) is the ready and easy way to achieve these aims. In *Paradise Lost*, when Adam asks God to supply him with a mate, he describes to God what he is looking for in a companion:

Of fellowship I speak  
 Such as I seek, fit to participate  
 All rational delight, wherein the brute  
 Cannot be human consort; they rejoice  
 Each with thir kinde, Lion with Lioness;  
 So fitly them in pairs thou hast combin'd;  
 Much less can Bird with Beast, or Fish with Fowle  
 So well converse, nor with the Ox the Ape. (8.389-96)

Adam wants only what the other animals in Eden possess, a mate. In his request, he mentions not sex, nor beauty, nor gardening skill. He asks for someone to talk to, to

participate in rational delight (not carnal), a consort who will speak the same language, as a bird would with another bird; share the same concerns, as would the lion and the lioness. And later, when Adam perceives the threat of the loss of Eve as a result of her original sin, he laments not the prospect of the loss of conjugal embraces, but of conjugal conversations: “How can I live without thee, how forgoe / Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn’d, / To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?” (9.910). To Milton this sweet converse is the most crucial element of marriage, the element that Adam most craved to find in marriage beforehand, and most feared the loss of afterwards. Converse is what allows a marriage to transcend the ordinary coupling of beasts and to approach the ideal of the couple becoming “one flesh.”

The marriage of Adam and Eve was, for Milton, the model for all marriage, and though the most crucial element is the converse between the pair, another precondition must also be in place for a marriage to be happy: that precondition is voluntariness. In *Tetrachordon*, he held out the marriage of Adam and Eve as the exemplar for all marriage, and he specified the importance of its voluntariness:

“To be inform’d aright in the whole History of Mariage, that we may know for certain, not by a forc’t yoke, but by an impartial definition, what Mariage is, and what is not Mariage; it will undoubtedly be safest, fairest, and most with our obedience, to enquire, as our Saviours direction is, how it was in the beginning” (*Tetrachordon* 1029).

Just as God “Our voluntarie service he requires,” so too does marriage require the element of voluntariness. According to Magro “for Milton it is precisely voluntariness...that marks his conception of marriage off from earlier Catholic and ecclesiastical models in general. A



marriage containing any aspect of compulsion is no marriage according to Milton” (102). The free will of the participants in a marriage is as important to the success of the marriage as their sociability, as it is likely that a lack of voluntariness would have an adverse affect on the converse and sociability. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve’s marriage to Adam was “not by a forc’t yoke” (*Tetrachordon* 1029) because in Eden, “force upon free Will hath here no place” (9.1174-5). Milton is at some pains to attempt to establish this as an indisputable fact, but the voluntariness of Eve’s betrothal to Adam does not seem to be a closed issue: she was created to be “a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18), and thus it is not unreasonable to assume that it was God’s will that she be Adam’s bride, and when God wills an event to happen, it becomes destiny, and therefore not really Eve’s decision. But Milton considers Eve’s participation to be voluntary, and portrays it as such in *Paradise Lost*.

Eve’s supposedly narcissistic dalliance with her reflection in the pool serves to illustrate that voluntariness. When at first she declines Adam’s overtures, she is gently enticed by God to reconsider, but is pointedly not forced to do so. She is coaxed rather than coerced:

there I had fixt  
 Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,  
 Had not a voice thus warnd me, What thou seest,  
 What there thou seest fair Creature is thy self,  
 With thee it came and goes: but follow me,  
 And I will bring thee where no shadow staies  
 Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee

Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy

Inseparablie thine. (4.465-73)

The voice of God convinces Eve rather than compelling her by tempting her away from the tantalizing image of her own face with the more attainable prospect of one ‘whose image thou art’ which she is likely to find appealing because she has just shown an attraction for her image reflected in the pool. The argument is effective, but not compelling. She seems to relent: “what could I doe / But follow strait, invisibly thus led?” (4.475-6), which is moving closer to the language of compulsion, but she turns away again at the first sight of Adam. And when Adam interjects on his own behalf, she still resists, only relenting when “thy gentle hand / Seisd mine, I yielded” (4.488-9), where the seemingly forceful word ‘seisd’ is tempered by the word ‘gentle’ implying that Eve is only being instructed in what will be to her best advantage, rather than compelled to do what is to the advantage of others.

Milton equivocates somewhat on Eve’s status as a subjugated being who may be closer to submissive than merely cooperative. She is not portrayed as submissive to Adam in her behavior, but seems always ready to submit if Adam calls for it. In the labor debate of Book 9, for instance, she does not hesitate to take a position contrary to Adam’s, and even, based on the result, to out-argue him, but before she separates from him she is careful to utter the words, “With thy permission then” (9.378). Milton’s equivocation continues when, at Satan’s first glimpse of Eve, he describes her as she yields “with coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet reluctant amorous delay” (4.311), these words intended to indicate a willingness on her part, tempered only by modesty, not uncooperativeness. And while Magro has implied, when referring to “Catholic and ecclesiastical models in

general,” that Milton’s conception of marriage is a sizable step away from the Pauline model of marriage and toward a more enlightened view of marriage as a partnership, it is not yet free of the constraints that St. Paul’s writings had imposed over the marriages of Christians. And despite the fact that the idea of voluntariness in a marriage is very important to Milton because it validates the free will of the participants, he did seem to inject a degree of submissiveness into Eve, to temper her free will with a kind of what he might perceive as feminine charm, perhaps as an example of what he perceived to be the natural state that would permit submissiveness to be voluntary. But he has drawn a fine line between inwardly willing submissiveness and compulsion from without. A fine line that his contemporaries no doubt found acceptable, but that present day minds must question, as it is difficult to reconcile the presence of submission with the absence of compulsion, as there needs be something to submit to for submission to be present. Perhaps to Milton it is a matter of the choice on a woman’s part being not whether or not she will submit but only to whom she will submit.

### ***A Pauline State of Affairs***

The issue of Eve’s free will in *Paradise Lost* is complicated by Milton’s failure to have come to a full reconciliation to St. Paul’s call for the subordination of woman, which is never given a full-throated endorsement by Milton, but which is never fully abandoned either, as he vacillates between Eve as subordinate and as independent. In “Tetrachordon,” Milton gives voice to a somewhat unusual opinion for his times regarding the niceties of marriage that is perhaps pertinent here:

Therefore his [St. Paul’s] precept is, *Wives be subject to your husbands as is fit in the Lord, Coloss. 3. 18. In every thing, Eph. 5. 24.* [Milton’s

italics.] Nevertheless man is not to hold her as a servant, but receives her into a part of that empire which God proclaims him to, though not equally, yet largely, as his own image and glory: for it is no small glory to him, that a creature so like him, should be made subject to him. Not but that particular exceptions may have place, if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yeeld; for then a superior and more naturall law comes in, that the wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female. (1030)

This troublesome passage seems to be Milton's attempt to explicate and justify the Pauline call for the subordination of women, but it also seems like an attempt to reconcile St. Paul's beliefs about the proper placement of women with his own; both attempts seem to be less than successful, fed perhaps by Milton's own vestigial sexist predilections. While seeing that she is elevated above a servant, Milton qualifies his description of the status of woman by the phrase "though not equally;" she is still "subject to him" establishing her status as secondary. The most significant problem with this passage seems to be the reasoning with regard to the exception where "if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity." The phrases "not equally" and "made subject to him" and later in the same piece, "so man is the head of woman" (1030) and "from her the first sin proceeded, which keeps her justly in the same proportion still beneath" (1030) make abundantly clear that marriage equality is not Milton's aim. But he seems to be conflicted if not outright confused when he speaks of "particular exceptions." Although he appears to dismiss the idea of equality in marriage, Milton is more sure that in a marriage there must be a 'head' than upon whose shoulders it should sit. The peace of the household in

question rests on the contented yielding of the husband, regardless of the (relative) degree of “prudence and dexterity” that the wife possesses, and since that contented yieldingness can be rescinded and reinstated by the man at any time, the head might be forced to change bodies repeatedly.

“Particular exceptions” are the downfall of rules. If this sort of exception is possible, then it is not the femaleness of the woman that disqualifies her for rule, but her suitability, her prudence and dexterity. If some women are indeed suitable, then who should rule is whoever is best-qualified to rule. If prudence and dexterity are the chief qualities that a ruler should possess, he or she who is most in possession of these qualities is best qualified to rule, thus “so man is the head of woman” is not always the case, and the fact that “from her the first sin proceeded” is rendered irrelevant. Milton is perhaps seeking recourse here in the aforementioned ‘naturall law’ supposing it to indicate that man is most often in possession of the traits that endorse his rule. But these seem to be thin legs of reasoning that he stands upon; a “superior and naturall law” that “the wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female” should not be subject to anything as arbitrary and changeable as the contented yielding of a man. This quote also goes against the grain of the commonplace accusation of uxoriousness on Adam’s part as it demarcates circumstances under which it is acceptable and appropriate for Adam to yield his position of dominance which in a sexist world where such things as uxoriousness are categorically condemned there are no such acceptable circumstances. This is another example of Milton’s failure to resolve or give a sound determination of his own sentiments regarding Eve’s rightful place in the world.

Eve's subordinate status appears to be an invention of exegetical convention supported by the popular opinion of the male of the species who has maintained a position of dominance over the female by force of will and perhaps just plain force, but not apparently as a matter of biblical authority. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam is castigated, "Was shee thy God" (10.145), for his inclination to treat Eve as an equal, but, as Turner points out, "if God 'ordained' her obedience and inferiority, then He did so in a scene that neither Scripture<sup>8</sup> nor Milton has recorded" (282). With regard to Eve's status, Milton seems to be bowing to convention and the exegetical authority of St. Paul rather than following his own authorial inclinations which seem to incline toward an unprecedented degree of equality and autonomy for Eve. In much the same way that Milton never seems to settle on a final version of his religion, he never really seems to decide what he thinks about Eve. Milton has undeniably come closer to accepting an ideal of feminine equality than is the custom in his culture—or moreover accepting feminine equality *as* an ideal—but he has declined to take the next step and accept the ideal as a practice. Turner asserts that, "Milton's Eve is not perfect in the sense of self-sufficient, of course, any more than Adam is; but compared with every other version she is an autonomous and well-rounded character with specific counterparts to Adam's mental and physical skills, happily able to out-argue him in matters that concern her own sphere of expertise" (281). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton has acknowledged the high value of womankind in general and Eve in particular, but despite her skills and expertise, and her companionate converse, he can not bring himself to endorse her fully-fledged equality, nor is he willing to exculpate Adam from the traditional accusation of uxoriousness.

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<sup>8</sup> St. Paul's New Testament musings notwithstanding, there is no such ordination in *Genesis*.

## *Uxorious Adam*

Milton addresses conventional perceptions of Adam's uxoriousness as well as Eve's vanity in *Paradise Lost*, but fails to arrive at a genuine resolution to either of these problematic matters revealing his conflicted positions on the matter of Eve's proper place in her marriage and her status as a woman in the world. Milton's conception of his epic poem was greatly influenced by his singular brand of Protestantism, which encompasses the influences of Arianism as well as his deference to St. Paul, and by his own somewhat confused views of women and marriage, which while more considerate of the woman's perspective seem to be still swayed by the conventional thought of his time. The subject of Eve's status and Adam's uxoriousness are of course interrelated: in order to establish what would be the appropriate manner of treatment that Adam should afford Eve, Milton would have had to resolve the question of Eve's status more fully. *Paradise Lost* does not proffer any indication that he had settled his beliefs on these subjects, with Milton apparently choosing both to discount the accusation of uxoriousness against Adam while still accusing him of it. As a result, Adam reflects Milton's same irresolution in his treatment of Eve, causing her status to vacillate between coequal and vassal. The blame for this irresolution rests as much with Milton and his God as with Adam.

In *Paradise Lost*, before the fall, having hearkened to Adam's plea for a mate, Milton's God concludes "it not good for Man to be alone" (8.445) and resolves to create a "fit help" (8.450) for Adam, who is undoubtedly pleased with the creation of Eve, perhaps to the point of being overly fond of and indulgent toward her, in a word, uxorious. For those who are disinclined to blame Eve alone for the fall, accusing Adam of uxoriousness serves as a way to deflect some or all of that blame away from Eve and

toward Adam. After the fall, Eve herself indulged in the practice of blaming Adam for her misstep, as the epic voice had predicted she would: “And left to her self, if evil thence ensue, / Shee first his weak indulgence will accuse” (9.1185-6). God saw fit to scold Adam for this failing as well, both in the Bible (Gen.3:17) and in Milton’s epic (10.145-57). But Adam as uxorious is not the only way to look at this episode. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam does indeed describe Eve as “so lovly faire, / That what seemd fair in all the World, seemd now / Mean” (8.471-3). He sees her as the most sublime of God’s creations, adjudging her “the sum of earthly bliss / Which I enjoy.” And while he acknowledges her inferiority, “For well I understand in the prime end / Of Nature her th’ inferiour” (8.540-1), he betrays that judgment to be half-hearted when he follows it with: “yet when I approach / Her loveliness, so absolute she seems / And in her self compleat” (8.546-8). In this quote, he seems at first to be parroting what he has been told, and then following it with what his own experience tells him. Raphael tries to disavow him of these notions of Eve’s worthiness, assuring him that he is the head of the household and that Eve’s beauty is of secondary status when compared to his formidable talents:

Oft times nothing profits more  
 Then self esteem, grounded on just and right  
 Well manag’d; of that skill the more thou know’st,  
 The more she will acknowledge thee her Head,  
 And to realities yield all her shows. (8.571-5)

But Adam is unsure of the parameters of his responsibility, and clings to his own judgment of Eve’s value: “Authority and Reason on her waite, / As one intended first, not after made” (8.555). Adam thus gives God the benefit of the doubt, assuming Eve to be



something more substantial than an afterthought for God; assuming her to be, as second-created, an improvement over the prototype.

To Adam, Eve is just as he wished her to be, and stands in need of no improvement. She seems to him the fulfillment of his desires, just as God had promised: “What next I bring shall please thee, be assr’d, / Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / *Thy wish, exactly to thy hearts desire*” (8.449-51; my emphasis), but despite Raphael’s admonishment, Adam’s original request of God seems to be much more of a request for an equal than for a subordinate:

Among unequals what societie  
 Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?  
 Which must be mutual, in proportion due  
 Giv’n and receiv’d; but in disparitie  
 The one intense, the other still remiss  
 Cannot well suite with either, but soon prove  
 Tedious alike: Of fellowship I speak  
 Such as I seek, fit to participate  
 All rational delight, wherein the brute  
 Cannot be human consort. (8.383-91)

Adam discounts the value of the possibility that unequals can engage in gratifying society, achieve harmony or true delight. Mutuality is intense; disparity, remiss. He desires fellowship with a like consort; this is how Adam describes the fulfillment of his ‘hearts desire’ to God. Yet when Adam waxes poetic about how pleased he is with the gift God has given him, Raphael cautions him that she is not his equal, but one of those

“things / Less excellent” (8.565-6). But Raphael’s reasoning is problematic: if Eve is to be Adam’s “*wish, exactly to thy hearts desire*,” it is for Adam to define her as he sees fit, not Raphael, nor even God. And what Adam sees is something so wondrous as to defy the descriptions as a subordinate that he is spoon-fed by Raphael. The charge of uxoriousness carries with it an implication of the unworthiness of woman to be treated as an equal, but to Adam Eve is anything but unworthy: “Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat / Build in her loveliest, and create an awe / About her, as a guard Angelic plac’t” (8.556-8). Adam is tacitly asking how it is that this creature is inferior, and no one ever gives him an acceptable explanation. Adam’s fondness for Eve is an appreciation of the creative powers of God more than an overvaluing of that creation. Raphael seems to be the mouthpiece of St. Paul, while perhaps Adam is closer to Milton’s own conflicted thinking on the subject of Eve’s status, wondering just how it is that she is inferior and why it is that God would create an inferior creature.

The impossibility of defining uxoriousness before fully defining man and woman and their respective roles creates for Milton a Gordian knot which he is unable to cleave. Milton, while still trying to portray Adam as Eve’s superior, wants nonetheless to portray Eve as a free agent. Milton has gone to some lengths to establish this free agency, particularly in the changing of the biblical story from their being together during the temptation to having them separate. This one small change creates the unquestionable free agency that Milton and Eve both crave. But critics such as Stella Revard and Fredson Bowers believe that Adam’s acquiescence to Eve’s wish to work separately should be held responsible for the couple’s loss of Paradise: that had Adam been more assertive, as he should have been, and rebuffed Eve’s entreaties, the pair would have been together at

the temptation and thus they would not have succumbed to the Devil's wiles. Revard asks "who does not think that [Eve] ... would not be ravished of her innocence if her husband had not permitted her to fare forth unprotected?" (69), implying that the fall of Man could have been averted if only the man had not fallen victim to the feminine wiles of his mate, that having allowed Eve to find herself in a predicament for which she was ill-equipped that Adam therefore bears the ultimate responsibility for her actions. Revard concurs with critics who "have argued that the cause of Eve's fall, and thus the responsibility for it, lies with the husband who sanctioned her exposure, not with the circumstance of that exposure" (69), squarely placing the blame at Adam's uxorious feet. Another such critic, Bowers, maintains that "Adam had no right to relieve himself from his responsibility to Eve by making her a free agent. In so doing he failed in his duty both to her and to God" (271). Bowers believes that Adam does not have the right to make her a free agent because in his permissive treatment of Eve he has imperiled her soul and that Adam's responsibility to administer her bodily and spiritual well-being supersedes his responsibility to foster her free will. But in assuming Eve to be Adam's responsibility and denying her status as a free agent, Revard and Bowers have relieved Eve of the responsibility for her own actions and denied her the self-determination that is according to Milton's God an essential, eternal, and unchangeable part of her nature. These critics have overlooked Milton's ambiguous position with regard to Adam's responsibility for Eve's actions. They are ready to blame Adam and exonerate Eve even when Milton himself is not ready to commit to this resolution.

Milton vacillates between blaming Eve and blaming Adam, perhaps wishing to blame them jointly, but not equally. By acting apart from Adam, Eve has knowingly or

not accepted the burden of responsibility of the free agent—at least in theory. In actual practice however, Milton has Eve balk at this responsibility: after her adamant advocacy for separation, she concludes with a request for permission, “With thy permission then” (9.378), thus backing away from responsibility for the actions that follow, and reburdening Adam with it. Then, after getting what she has asked for, when the results turn out bad, she chastises Adam for not forbidding her separation and thus preventing disaster: “Being as I am, why didst not thou the Head / Command me absolutely not to go” (9.1155), as if she believed that it were his responsibility, abrogated irresponsibly, to deny her free will. Eve’s confusion may reflect Milton’s own somewhat conflicted attitude toward women and their ability or inability to embrace full responsibility for their actions, and the conundrum of their free will being clouded by their subordination.

Eve’s separation from Adam is an example of the freedom that an individual is entitled to as having been created in the image of God, who has defined free will as an integral component of humanity. Adam declines to forbid Eve to separate from him when she suggests that they “divide our labours” (9.214) and this refusal has not gone uncriticized, by God in particular, who when He asks: Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey / Before his voice” (10.145-6) reminds the reader of the line “Shee for God in him” (4.299) forcing the question ‘was Adam then Eve’s God, that she should obey him before God’s voice?’ And when He asks Adam, “Was shee thy God?” this question implies that it is only God who can relieve him of this responsibility for Eve. When God instructs Adam or Eve to do something or to refrain from doing something (such as tasting of the fruit), God accepts the responsibility for the action or inaction that He has endorsed; the responsibility only shifts to the human when they disobey, decline to follow

orders, act contrary to God's wishes. By requiring Adam to act in a certain fashion, God has relieved Adam from the responsibility for these actions (and coincidentally deprived Adam of his own self-determination in this instance): as long as whomever is obedient, they should be safe from any adverse consequences of that obedience, whereas disobedience is an unspoken acceptance of responsibility on the part of the actor. God continues to castigate Adam's behavior, asking:

or was shee made thy guide,  
 Superior, or but equal, that to her  
 Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood, and the Place  
 Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
 And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd  
 Hers in all real dignitie. (10.146-51)

Milton's God equates Adam's responsibility for Eve with manhood or even Godhead:

implying at least if not outright declaring that Adam should act toward Eve as if he were God, to be her guide as God is mankind's guide, that to treat her as equal is to resign his superiority which is the essence of his manhood, and that God has placed Adam above Eve in much the same way that God is above Adam, making her his responsibility.

Milton's God is here essentially telling Adam that he should not have abrogated his godly responsibility over Eve—that he should have acted in imitation of God. But, by refusing to play the tyrant and forbid Eve to make her own choice of course of action, Adam is acting in imitation of God. In much the same way that God proscribed the fruit of tree of knowledge yet did not prevent Adam and Eve from eating of it, so Adam has made it known to Eve that he wishes her not to leave his side, yet he does not forbid her to do so.

He believes that it is not his prerogative: “beyond this had bin force, / And force upon free Will hath here no place” (9.1174-5). Adam has asked of God: “Hast thou not made me here thy substitute” (8.381), and again acting seemingly in imitation of God, he has decided against the employment of force, and yet he is chastised by God for his efforts to do as he believed that God would have done.

As an individual creation of God, and a representative of humanity, Eve has her own personhood and consequently she alone should be responsible for her own actions as well as her salvation. While Adam and Milton may wish to put Eve on a pedestal for protection and admiration, to do so deprives her of her essential nature. She can not be both mistress of Adam and master of her destiny. Being “for God in him” does not relieve her of the responsibility for her own actions. The phrase, “shee for God in him” is often seen to be of great importance to the poem and to Milton, but the emphasis on “in him” is misplaced. The “shee for God” is not undone by the “in him.” God will still hold her responsible for her actions, so if it is to be done justly, those actions must be of her own volition. If Adam had declined to join her in the eating of the fruit, she would have presumably suffered whatever the punishment alone. Adam may be upbraided by God for what Michael calls his “effeminate slackness” (11.634), but God will still punish Eve for her sin, so she must be personally responsible for it. Thus she must be permitted to make those choices unencumbered with any thought of subjugation or inequality. The descriptions of their lapses reflect separate responsibility as well as distinct punishments. She was deceived; he was not. She will suffer pain in childbirth; he will sweat and toil to coax food from the earth. Being for God in him does not put Adam between Eve and

God's wrath, nor give Adam any sway over her salvation, nor does it protect her from damnation.

Despite having created Eve as a member of humanity, and thus a presumptively self-determined individual, Milton's God declines to fully endorse that self-determination, and when she exercises her self determination He condemns her for doing so and Adam for permitting her to do so. The same freedom that is reflected in the choice by Adam to allow his wife to make her own decision regarding their separation is the freedom that gives meaning to any behavior; any behavior not freely chosen can not rightfully bring blame down upon the actor. The only way a man or woman can be rightly held accountable for their failings or successes is if they are possessed of free will and chose their actions. And the only way they can be held responsible for the actions of another is if that other does not have free will. If Adam declines to allow Eve to act in the manner she desires, he not only usurps her free will but burdens his own; he becomes consequentially responsible for her actions as well as his own. To have chosen to obey is what gives meaning to obedience; and to choose to disobey is what makes the wages of sin fair pay. Milton's failure to unequivocally establish Eve's degree of equality in her self-determination, makes her equality of responsibility iniquitous, and makes it difficult to answer the question of whether Eve as a creation of God is entitled to be treated as a free agent, or whether Adam has abrogated his responsibility as Eve's caretaker by allowing her to separate from him against his wishes. Instead of choosing between the two options, Milton seems to trying to have it both ways, to the detriment of his God and his poem.

Milton's God of *Paradise Lost* is not, however, alone in being problematic: the duality arises out of the Bible itself; Milton is only guilty of failing to resolve the ambiguity. God's sentence upon Adam from *Genesis* includes the words, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife" (Gen. 3:17), implying that Adam has failed in his responsibility as a result of treating his wife as an equal, thus adding support to the accusation of uxoriousness against Adam. It is difficult to reconcile a conception of paradise with a place where one person is subordinate to another. Perhaps it was only paradise for Adam, and Eve was a mere accoutrement; being subject to the will of another would clearly not constitute a paradise for Eve. The implications of the term 'one flesh' (Gen. 2:24) also imply an equality in their relationship as well; becoming one flesh out of two separate beings is an image of equality. It suggests that both parties bring to their partnership equally valuable commodities, and that they both contribute more or less equally to the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Eve as a discrete individual should not be forced to rely on Adam's vigilance to assure her salvation. Milton's God seems to be having difficulty maintaining a consistent set of expectations toward his creations: all decisions that redound to an individual's salvation should be at that individual's discretion. If Eve is an individual she has to be responsible for her own actions as well as her own salvation.

### ***Milton's Eve***

Eve holds a special fascination for Milton. Milton's ideal of marriage grows out of his ideal of womanhood, as if he conceptualized the perfect setting of marriage in which to place his perfect jewel, Eve. She is to Milton as Helen was to Homer, Beatrice



to Dante: the ideal woman. Karen Edwards asks, “Is ‘Eve’ not John Milton’s representation of an ideal female human being, a perfect woman—perfect, at least, before the fall?” (231), and indeed Milton does seem to fetishize Eve as perfect, but being Milton’s idea of the perfect woman does not exempt her from being problematic, in fact Milton’s inability to disentangle her from the web of his own fetishism and his personalized version of early modern sexism is the source of much that is problematic about her. Edwards continues, “Eve is explicitly fashioned and formed according to male desire—so explicitly that we need to ask whether she is a representation of Edenic woman, or a representation of Edenic male fantasy” (239), a legitimate question on the surface, but inasmuch as she was—and remains—the only Edenic woman, she is thus only representative of herself.

Her status as a male fantasy however is worth considering. Created as she was by the masculine God to fulfill the heart’s desire of a man, she is essentially Milton’s fantasy of God’s fantasy of Adam’s fantasy. Adam is immediately besotted with her and offers nothing but praise when he speaks of her, as when he describes her to Raphael in Book 8 as “the sum of earthly bliss / Which I enjoy” (8.522-3). Nor is her affect limited to the human, as despite having only a single human admirer, when she ‘went forth,’ “from about her shot Darts of desire / Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight” (8.62-3). Even Satan is, by the sight of Eve, momentarily dumbstruck: “Stupidly good, of enmitie disarm’d, / Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge” (9.465-6). The mere sight of her is a fulfillment of male fantasy; yet she is seemingly not good enough: she is disparaged by Raphael, as a thing “less excellent” (8.566) and merely “an outside” (8.568). This disparagement may well be another symptom of Milton’s ambiguous and paradoxical

relationship with the ideal of femininity and the idea of feminine equality. Milton seems always to approach a radical degree of sympathy toward womanhood, only to withdraw his favor before the act is consummated. Turner argues that, “Milton cannot be entirely cleared of the charges of ‘Eve-baiting’ .... There is clearly an undertone in the poem that points to the maleness of the good angels and accuses Eve of narcissism in the lake-episode, sensual weakness in the dream, perversity in the gardening alone, and concupiscence in admitting Satan’s courtly amours” (291). There is certainly an undertone of an assumption of feminine inferiority in the poem. Milton seems to be unable to come to terms with his conflicted conception of Eve; she is to him both “the sum of earthly bliss,” and yet a thing “less excellent.” The determination of her quality seems to depend on who is making that determination: while God and his angels belittle her, Satan appreciates “her Heav’nly forme” (9.457) and to Adam she is a thing most excellent.

Turner’s catalogue of her failings—narcissism, perversity, and concupiscence—is attributed to Milton’s Eve-baiting, but these common criticisms of Eve center on her being as she was created to be. She was created by God as a thing of beauty. She merely recognizes that beauty; she does not take credit for it. Making the charge of narcissism stick is difficult because the narcissism or vanity—“there I had fixt / Mine eyes till now, and pin’d with vain desire” (4.465-6)—of which she is often accused is not any inherent pathology in her. At that moment when she espies the reflected image in the water, she is not aware that the image with which she is entranced is her own: “A Shape within the watry gleam appeard / Bending to look on me, I started back, / It started back” (4.461-3). She is merely appreciating a thing of beauty just as everyone else does when they

encounter her. Her value to others has routinely been established as being chiefly ornamental so she is only valuing in herself what everyone else values most in her.

No one but Adam seems to prize anything about her other than her appearance, and even Adam suggests that perhaps her creator went too far in bestowing her with beauty, and not far enough in other areas: “at least on her bestow’d / Too much of Ornament, in outward shew / Elaborate, of inward less exact (8.537-9). It is true that she is not Adam’s intellectual equal, “Of Nature her th’ inferiour, in the mind / And inward Faculties” (8.537-41), but he asked God only that she be “fit to participate / [in] All rationale delight” (8.390-1), and she may be intellectually inferior, but she is nonetheless able to convince Adam against his better judgment to allow her to separate from him. When Adam evaluates her as she actually seems to him, instead of how he is told she is by others, her status rises to that of an equal or perhaps even a better:

yet when I approach

Her loveliness, so absolute she seems  
 And in her self compleat, so well to know  
 Her own, that what she wills to do or say,  
 Seems wisest, vertuosest, discreetest, best;  
 All higher knowledge in her presence falls  
 Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her  
 Looses discount’nanc’t, and like folly shewes;  
 Authority and Reason on her waite,  
 As one intended first, not after made  
 Occasionally; and to consummate all,

Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat

Build in her loveliest, and create an awe

About her, as a guard Angelic plac't. (8.546-59)

While Adam unquestionably appreciates Eve's physical attributes, he values her for more than her appearance; to him she "Seems wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best." Though her intellect is degraded by God and Raphael, to him she seems possessed of something better – if difficult to identify – something in the face of which, knowledge and wisdom run for cover. Adam even goes so far as to consider it a possibility that she is an improvement over him, "As one intended first." What he values is evidently different than what God and angels value which leads him to some degree of uncertainty about himself. Adam's conflicted description to Raphael seems to indicate that he is unable to reconcile what he is expected to feel with what he does feel. He is reproached by Raphael for "attributing overmuch to things / Less excellent (8.565-6). But as she is the putative fulfillment of his dream, it is his to determine how fully she has filled that dream; and if he is uxorious, it must be possible to be overly fond of the fulfillment of one's fondest dream.

Eve's suit for separation can be seen as an attempt to escape Adam's oppressive influence or to assert power or dominance over the uxorious Adam, but Eve sees the separation not as a method to be rid of Adam or to dominate him, but rather as a means to be worthy of him. Critics William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden maintain that Eve has grown weary of Adam's company and wants to be alone. They argue that Eve has experienced "some sense of oppressive closeness . . . some souring on the sweet flirtation of their daytime eroticism" (46), and that she desires to work separately from Adam

because she wants to get away from him. But Eve seeks neither independence from nor preeminence over Adam, only autonomy which is the only equality of which she perceives herself to be capable. She does not see herself as Adam's equal, "I yielded, and from that time see / How beauty is excelld by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair" (4.489-91), but wishes to be treated with the respect for her choices that she is entitled to as an autonomous being, a kind of qualified equality. Equality equates to worth for Eve, and it is in the effort "to draw his love" that she seeks it. To be Adam's equal will make her more worthy of his love. She desires only to maintain a degree of autonomy within the confines of her marriage: "so to add what wants / In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love" (9.821-2). Eve's perception is that if she can establish herself as an autonomous individual ("what wants") Adam will find her more appealing. She is looking only to draw more of Adam's love, not wrest a position of dominance from him. God accuses Adam of having resigned his manhood to Eve ("was shee made thy guide, / Superior, or but equal, that to her / Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood" (10.146-8) when he granted her wish to separate; but Adam has only granted her the autonomy that he believes is not his right to deny when permits her the separation that he had argued against. Adam has only declined to deny Eve her free will, not ceded her the position of dominance from which she is uninterested in unseating him.<sup>9</sup>

Eve's pursuit of autonomy advances the question of whether that autonomy is a gift from God or a gift from Adam, of whether she is entitled to autonomy by her God-given nature or has cozened it from an uxorious and idolatrous spouse. God created Eve for Adam, "Hee for God only, shee for God in him," but He also presumably held Eve to

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<sup>9</sup> Rudat's contentions in "Pope's Belinda, Milton's Eve, And The Missionary Position" about the missionary versus female superior positions notwithstanding.

the same moral standards as He did Adam. When God punishes Eve separately from Adam, this tends to indicate that He sees her as a free agent, and thus responsible for her actions, and when He sentences her “to thy Husbands will / Thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule” (10.195-6), this sounds very much like a countermanding of a previous status, where she would not have been ruled over by her husband. Milton’s thoughts on the subjugation of Eve are conflicted. God punishes Eve for her sin separately from Adam rather than holding him accountable for her sin, and this implies that she has the same free will as Adam to obey and worship God. But this implication does seem to put Milton’s God in a paradoxical position. He wished to be freely worshipped by Eve without compulsion, just as it was with Adam, which would presuppose her free will; but to make her a more suitable gift to Adam He has limited her free will. It seems unlikely that one could retain one’s free will and yet remain subjugated. The words Milton put in God’s mouth are at best confusing, and at worst inconsistent, but it is clear that whatever the extent to which she was subjugated before the fall, it increased afterwards.

The subjugation of prelapsarian Eve is a complicated subject, and perhaps irresolvable. Milton seems to want Eve’s equality to end where her autonomy does. He is willing to grant her autonomy but not equality. And it is not clear whether she is entitled to the autonomy or merely granted it by Adam. Lewalski points out that:

At the center of his epic, Milton set a richly imagined representation of prelapsarian love, marriage, and domestic society. It is a brilliant though sometimes conflicted representation, in which Milton’s internalization of contemporary assumptions about gender hierarchy, his idealistic view of

companionate marriage, his own life experiences, and his deeply felt emotional needs sometimes strain against each other. (479)

The conflicted representation to which Lewalski refers is Milton again trying to have it both ways: he wants to show that Eve is the perfect woman, yet she is still responsible for the fall of man. He wants her to be obedient yet self-determined; autonomous, but not independent; substantive, but not equal. He is “of two minds” on the subject of women, and can not find reconciliation. His “internalization of contemporary assumptions about gender hierarchy” is in opposition to his “idealistic view of companionate marriage.” He finds himself in conflict between the way things ought to be—the ideal toward which man should strive as his duty to God—and the way things are, which, while not ideal, has some qualities which he is loath to surrender—specifically, the sway which man holds over woman.

Milton is unable to separate himself from these gender bugaboos perhaps because it is too great a sacrifice of the masculine cultural advantage. “The original non-subordination of Eve, and the original immortality of man,” that Turner alludes to, illustrates that what is culled from biblical texts is often more a matter of what is wished for than what is actually there. It has suited the purposes of men to find confirmation of their superiority in the biblical text, and so they have. Milton’s conflicted outlook on Eve is apparent to Turner as well, but he finds an artistic good in this dichotomous portrayal of Eve:

Milton has succeeded in bringing to life, in the *praxis* of his art, two quite different models of the politics of love: one is drawn from the experience of being in love with an equal, and the mutual surrender of ‘due

benevolence', the other from the hierarchical arrangement of the universe, and the craving for male supremacy. (285)

Turner appears to also recognize Milton's desire to have it both ways: an Eve who is the sum of earthly bliss, while still blameworthy for her own failings as well as for the fall. While acknowledging the "craving for male supremacy" that Milton was apparently unable to resist, and its coexistence with an apparent inclination on Milton's part toward a view of Eve as Adam's equal, Turner's notion of the praxis of art may give the reader the best way to approach this paradox. In much the same way that it is Adam's prerogative to decide what is his heart's desire, so too each reader is entitled to see the paradise that they find most paradisaical, and the Eve that they find most appealing. Perhaps in order for each reader of *Paradise Lost* to fully comprehend the tragedy of the loss of paradise, each reader must be permitted to envision the paradise that they desire. Perhaps it is necessary to have paradise be somewhat fluid for each reader to be able to see in Adam and Eve's paradise a paradise of their own. In its zeal to establish free will, *Paradise Lost* leaves many if not every reader with the impression that if they had been there, things would have been different, that they would have been able to resist temptation, and to have remained grateful and satisfied with their share of bliss. And in imagining themselves in Eden, they must be able to imagine Eden as their own paradise, as the paradise that they would have been loath to lose. The dichotomy of Eve's status provides the story with a variable narrative outlook which can be adjusted to accommodate the individual preferences of the reader; "thus 'every commentator,' as Voltaire said perhaps more wisely than he knew, 'makes his own Eden'" (Turner 39).



Every reader must be permitted to imagine an Eden that they find paradisaal; some are more comfortable with autonomy, others with autocracy.

St. Paul and the other exegetical exemplars have taken a position regarding Eve's subjugated status similarly motivated by their own wishes that circumstances be as they wished them to be rather than by the supposed textual certainties that they pretend to examine. In much the same way that biblical scholars have managed to present Eve's subordination as a certainty in the text of the book of Genesis despite the fact that as Turner said, "if God 'ordained' her obedience and inferiority, then He did so in a scene that neither Scripture nor Milton has recorded" (282). In fact the very chapter that these exegetes put forth as evidence of Eve's subordination actually supplies us with the best evidence against their position. In the *Genesis* version of the story of Adam and Eve, Eve is indeed created for Adam, and her creation is explained as fulfilling Adam's need for a helper ("there was not found a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:20).) This stands in support of the inference of her subordination, but, ironically, the chief support for the argument against her subordination in Eden is the sentence God pronounces against her as a result of the fall, which includes the proviso "he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). As Turner has pointed out, "there would be little point in announcing her subjection to her husband as a dire consequence of the fall ("... 3.16 ") if she were already a subordinate" (16). Inasmuch as God bothered to utter this pronouncement, it is reasonable to infer that this 'rule' is a new circumstance, and that Adam's rule over Eve did not begin until this pronouncement was uttered.

Turner suspects that Eve's subordination is an exegetical addendum rather than a textual certainty. He credits the male desire for domination:

The ideological imperative, the passionate desire to dominate the female, thus has the power to override the hermeneutic process itself. The original non-subordination of Eve, and the original immortality of man, are equally inferable from the text; and yet one is almost universally accepted, and the other almost universally denied. (119)

Biblical scholars see what they want to see in the biblical text. It is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy where exegetical principles have been overcome by the desire of the exegetical principals to justify an ideology; as if they had decided what they would find before they looked, and apparently wishing to see Eve as a subordinate, they manage to do just that. Turner indicates that this is a longstanding tradition:

None of the significations agreed upon by the exegetes—the presence of Satan, the promise of a redeemer, the ‘fall’ and original sin, the notion that Adam and Eve represented the most perfect stage of humanity—has any basis in the text. The most stubborn of all these shadowy assumptions, the secondary status of Eve, is almost equally unfounded. (129)

These exegetical entrepreneurs were willing to inject these notions into the text and occasionally formulate entire religious denominations around them, catechisms about them, and occasional heresy accusations against those who would disagree. Those who determined Eve’s subject status allowed their own personal interests to obscure their vision in determining that Eve was Adam’s subordinate. John Shawcross too seems to see a hint of conspiracy in this subjugation of Eve, when he makes the point that, “because the Bible came out of a male-dominated society it should be clear why God is male and why a holy trinity likened to a family finally came into religious thought as Christianity

was being organized . . . ” (208), the premise being that male superiority is a male-created bugaboo intended to intimidate women and help to maintain the male dominance that had served the male so well for so long. Being the divinely-endorsed dominant sex is certainly a boon to the male of the species, and it was in the best interests of these exegetes, themselves men, to find that male-dominance was the biblical norm so that they might maintain that status as the dominant party of humanity.

Perhaps that desire to maintain the societal upper hand led the exegetes in question, not wishing to surrender male-dominance as the status quo, to emphasize God’s pronouncement against Eve as the dominant text to be considered, ignoring the seeming contradictions. That domination becomes easier to maintain as the status quo if it can be established that it is what God wants, the status deo as it were, and that it has been that way since the first humans came into being. Milton was equally guilty of this inclination to see what he wanted to see in the biblical text, a reverence for “how it was in the beginning” (*Tetrachordon* 1029), but he never seemed to be able to decide precisely what it was that he wanted to see where Eve was concerned. His idea that a woman can be permitted to rule a household with the willing endorsement of her husband gives us an idea of his inclinations, and it could be seen as the first step in a process of gender equalization. If it is acceptable for a woman to assume a dominant position in some particular circumstances, then it becomes only a matter of how often these circumstances accrue, and should they exceed the fiftieth percentile, then man is no longer the dominant party. Milton here seems to be approaching an admittedly unprecedented approximation

of gender equity, but refuses to cross the threshold, perhaps in fear of St. Paul<sup>10</sup> being on the other side.

### ***Eve's Design Flaw***

While blaming Adam's uxoriousness or attributing it to Milton's concession to St. Paul are perhaps more popular, there is another possible explanation for the predicament in which Eve found herself when confronted unaccompanied by Satan. One might blame the designer for a design flaw in the make-up of humankind: if the failure was due to an inherent flaw in the subjects then it is not they who are to blame for their actions, but the designer. Milton as designer of God and God as designer of Adam and Eve are both to blame for these difficulties. There is a design flaw in Eve, "this fair defect / Of Nature" (10.891-2). She is created for the pleasure of a man, but Eve has the same nature that is native to any human; she has free will. But Milton complicates the free will that Eve, by his own definition, has as a representative of humanity by trying to simultaneously portray her as in some way somewhat subordinate to Adam. Despite the apparent mutual exclusivity of these two qualities, Milton tries to have it both ways, and he winds up with a misapprehended creation that 400 years have not been able to explain properly. This situation is of course not entirely of Milton's own making; he is after all only trying to reconcile his Biblical source material with his own conception of reality, but it is a difficult if not impossible task. Speaking of the passages where Milton tries to establish Eve's subordinate nature and her complaisant attitude toward it (4.297-9 & 488-91)),

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<sup>10</sup> As the note from *The Riverside Milton* states, "Milton was a moderate, if not a liberal, on the subject of the subordination of women in marriage, though he was bound by St. Paul's various pronouncements about the subordination of women" (451).

Shawcross maintains that “these various passages define the subordinationism underlying Milton’s view of humankind, but one that fits into a full range of being from God the Father down to the lowest of animal life. Further, of course, it attempts to offer some prototypical ways of looking at man—given to mental and physical activity—and at woman—beautiful and passive” (10-11). This subordinationism is the source of the problem for Milton, if not the very problem itself. Milton is unable to escape his desire to portray Eve as subordinate according to the bent of his culture, while attempting to describe her as self-determined according to the bent of her supposed God-given nature, but in doing so he is not able to reconcile her subordination without impeding her free agency. Eve’s reason-for-being conflicts with the nature of her being. If she was created for Adam and ostensibly belongs to Adam, her free will is compromised by her subjugation and secondary status. She can not be free and self-determined and yet subjugated to Adam.

Milton’s attempt at a resolution to this enigma of the conflict between Eve’s free will and her duty to her husband resembles the function of the prelapsarian code discussed earlier that asks Adam and Eve for obedience as a sign of their love for God. God supposes that those who love Him will obey Him as a result of that love and not require any other reason to do so; they will leave the fruit unmolested because they know that is what He wishes. Adam – as he often is – in imitation of God hopes for much the same unquestioning obedience from Eve. Like God, Adam does not want reason to be the guide of Eve’s behavior. Adam wants obedience for the sake of love to be a good enough reason for Eve to change her mind and amend her behavior. The solution that Adam finds most appealing is for Eve to willingly defer to his greater wisdom and stay by his side,

but she is unwilling to do so. When she declines to be willingly obedient, he declines to compel her, once more in imitation of God. Eve will relent in this wish to separate only if forbidden by Adam to proceed ("with thy permission then"), but she will not relent just to please him. Adam, who staunchly believes that "force upon free Will hath here no place" (9.1175), is thus put in the position where he must decide what is more important, Eve's acquiescence to his wishes or Eve's free will, and like God, when He put the tree of the forbidden fruit within mankind's reach, Adam decides for the latter rather than the former.

Milton's God, as designer, is also blameworthy for this failure of reconciliation due to the fact that dominion over his mate seems to never have been sought by Adam, and once foisted upon him is little appreciated. Having granted him dominion over the beasts of the land, birds of the air, and fish of the sea, God seems to have chosen to extend that dominion over Adam's spouse as well, and to make Adam into a miniature version of himself. God expected that this would be seen by Adam as a fine thing; that he would be pleased and act accordingly. Adam has acted in imitation of God in most cases, but in this case, the responsibility lies heavily upon his shoulders and he is unwilling to bear it. Adam had asked God to supply him with a "helpmeet" which is for his purposes a friend and companion with which to share his existence. But God has instead burdened Adam with a charge and a responsibility. Adam's appeal to God for a mate (8.389-97) made no mention of a subordinate; he asked for fellowship, a consort, and these are not words of the language of subordination. As Turner states, "Adam's most fervent desire is for an equal—a desire so deeply rooted in his being that it gives him the astonishing ability to argue down the Almighty within minutes of his creation" (280). Surely Adam

can not be held responsible for God's failure to fulfill his wish "exactly to thy hearts desire" (8.451), and thus God, as designer, must take at least a share of the responsibility for the fall, despite His having neither predestined nor willed it.

### ***Eve's Uncloistered Virtue***

Adam's acquiescence to Eve's request for a separation has been called uxorious and has shared God's blame for their fall with Eve's inability to brook restraint, but Adam's behavior is not uxorious, and neither is it the cause of the fall. To blame his uxoriousness for the fall is to deny Eve the responsibility for her own actions. McColley argues that "Adam's respect for Eve's liberty, though imitating God's for his own, is then a first step in the Fall" ("Free Will and Obedience" 105). But Adam's behavior is only a step, and perhaps not even the first one. Adam's respect for Eve's liberty is, in addition to being in imitation of God's respect for Adam's liberty, a manifestation of his love for Eve, but it is not selfless, nor is it his only reason. Adam allowed Eve to separate from him as a way to establish that her continued presence at his side is voluntary. The voluntary quality of Eve's presence can only be confirmed by her voluntary return, and in order to effect her return, he must permit her departure. As McColley puts it: "Adam is learning to recognize Eve as a gifted individual and to value her liberty of will, which, along with its challenging liabilities, makes possible the dignity and joy of love freely given" ("Free Will and Obedience" 112). To gain confirmation that Eve's continued companionship is freely given, he must grant her autonomy, give her the opportunity to choose to do otherwise.

Adam and Eve are both diffident of one another's motives and love. In response to Eve's request for separation, Adam's response, "But if much converse perhaps / Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield" betrays his wounded feelings, and nearly everything Eve does throughout the poem is in an effort to gain and hold Adam's love. Both of them feel the need to establish that the fondness that the heart feels is not the love of a slave for a gentle master, but the freely given love of free individuals which can only be established through a voluntary separation for: "how / Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve / Willing or no, who will but what they must / By Destinie, and can no other choose?" (5.529-34). A voluntary return from an absence freely permitted legitimizes the behavior of both parties. Adam says that compulsion has no place in Eden, but these are empty words until he demonstrates that he means to abide by them. The separation is where Adam's words make the leap to actions, demonstrating that he believes in the principles he speaks, and is willing to translate them to actions despite his reservations about the likely outcome. Eve even gives him the opportunity to refuse her permission to separate, but he declines to do so. Rather than a demonstration of craven uxoriousness, permitting Eve to separate from him shows that Adam is bravely willing to take the chance that Eve will not return so that he might have proof of the voluntary nature of her presence if and when she does return. This act also provides Eve with the same such evidence, although this seems to be more of Adam's than Eve's motive which is more an attempt to establish herself as a separate individual from Adam.

For Eve, voluntariness is more than just the choice to continue as Adam's companion; it must also include a separate will. She must prove to herself that she is an entity separate from Adam with a will of her own. The Argument for Book Nine states



that “*Eve loath to be thought not circumspect or firm enough, urges her going apart, the rather desirous to make tryal of her strength*” (Milton’s italics). Eve feels the need to assert herself as circumspect and strong enough to be separate to prove that she is in fact separate. She desires to prove her presence as voluntary, but moreover to prove to herself that she is able to be alone, to be apart from Adam, to be separate from him and yet maintain a meaningful existence: to make trial of her strength. Milton’s statement in *Areopagitica* about untested virtue serves as a good explanation for Eve’s apparent need to separate:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister’d virtue, unexercis’d & unbreath’d,  
that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race,  
where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.  
Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much  
rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary.  
(1006)

Eve needs to uncloister her virtue, to get it out in the open. She needs to prove to herself and to those who have demeaned her character and her intelligence that she is a person of consequence in her own right and not just an appurtenance to Adam.

Milton’s use in the above quotation of such athletically based metaphors as exercise, breathing, and the awarding of a garland for the winning of a race are apropos here, and correspond tidily to the idea of exercise being used to strengthen the virtue as it would the body. For Eve, the trial is the thing that will confirm her individuation, for “what is Faith, Love, Vertue unassaid . . . ?” (9.335). Eve’s separation from Adam is a personification of Milton’s belief in the need to put virtue to trial. Eve is determined to

make trial of herself and prove her worth independent of Adam. She doubtless expects to be honored as a victor upon her return and to find herself, “more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesireable” (9.823-4). By permitting Eve to sally forth to meet her adversary, Adam endorsed the breathing and the exercise of Eve’s virtue, and the idea that “that which purifies us is triall.”

Eve’s insistence on working separate from Adam demonstrates a drastic change from her earlier position. In Book Four she told Adam, “what thou bidst / Unargu’d I obey; so God ordains, / God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more / Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise” (4.635-8). This change is indicative of a kind of maturation or at least a change in comportment on Eve’s part. She has evidently grown dissatisfied with her circumstance as Adam’s accoutrement, and has resolved to pursue her individuation despite Adam’s wishes to the contrary. She has indeed become satiated with Adam’s converse, or at least his control, and has decided that the route to her continued happiness does not necessarily always go through him. It may well be that Adam’s caution regarding the possibility of the presence of Satan may have made the separation additionally appealing for her because “triall is by what is contrary.” Adam has made it clear that he is against the idea of separation, yet he supplies Eve with a tempting excuse for doing so: “But if much converse perhaps / Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield. / For solitude sometimes is best societie” (9.248-9), an excuse that as Lewalski points out, had not previously occurred to her. Lewalski indicates the ineffectuality of this move on Adam’s part:

Besides offering a better rationale for going than any she has thought of,  
Adam unwittingly intensifies the psychological pressure on her by his

repeated imperatives – ‘Go...go...rely...do’ – making it much more difficult for her to stay without seeming to back down ignominiously. It was not Adam’s place in prelapsarian Eden to command Eve to stay and thereby control her free choice in the moral sphere; but neither was it his place to help her choose such a dangerous course of action by giving over his proper leadership role. (485)

Adam has effectively called Eve’s bluff and forced her hand, but had he not, she would have needed to find another excuse because she is determined to individuate herself from Adam. But while Lewalski’s point acknowledging Adam’s conflicted position is well-taken, she is buying into the accusation of uxoriousness against him. Crediting Adam with supplying her “better rationale” discounts Eve’s determination “to make trial of her strength” and ignores that she is “loath to be thought not circumspect or firm enough.” Eve did not require nor recognize any contribution from Adam to her arguments, and had resolved before she spoke to him to do as she had planned unless he forbade her to do so, so this “better rationale” he provided was not a contribution that Eve valued.

Just as there must be a viable choice not to obey for obedience to be genuine and worthy of merit, so too must virtue be tested in order to establish that it is indeed virtue and not mere happenstance. Virtue unchallenged—“fugitive and cloister’d”—is virtue that has never made nor been given the opportunity to make correct choices which are the only determinant of merit. Eve’s determination to make trial of herself was not to be denied, and had her pretext of maintenance of the garden been subverted, she would no doubt have found some other. Hermine Van Nuis has observed that Eve “requires some solitude, it seems, to adjust her image of Adam and to revise, as a result, the perception of

her own.” (51). Eve wishes to prove to herself and to Adam as well that she is capable of the circumspection and strength that are required of an independent individual, thereby establishing herself as worthy of self-love as well as his love: “A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior: for inferior who is free?” (9.825); thus she will adjust her image of herself to prove herself a capable individual, a free agent worthy of Adam, an equal in some respects, and perhaps even a “sometime superior.” Sometime superior”-ity equates to freedom for Eve; Godhead, even.

### ***Appeal of Godhead***

The foremost reason for Eve’s pursuit of Godhead is her belief that more knowledge will make her “more equal” to Adam, and that being “more equal” will make her more appealing. In saying that “growing up to Godhead; which for thee / Chiefly I sought, without thee can despise” (9.877-8), she has stated that the chief appeal of Godhead for her is the increased appeal that it will give her in Adam’s eyes. Godhead to Eve amounts essentially to equality, and her definition of equality is a state where one is sometimes more equal than the other; sometimes superior, sometimes inferior. To be always inferior is to be less than equal, and to be less than equal is to be less than free—and thus less appealing to Adam. She perceives her limited self-determination as the source of their inequality for although she possesses a modicum of self-determination it is evidently not to the same degree as Adam’s. He needn’t ask her permission for anything, yet she must ask his. She believes that to be less equal must be a thing undesirable, and perceives this inequality as a failing in herself, rather than as intrinsic to her nature. If she believed that it were innate, she would despair of changing it. She believes that the

imbalance of knowledge between her and Adam is the failing from which their inequality springs. Knowledge is what wants in “femal sex” (9.822), and knowledge is not intrinsic or innate; it is acquired; thus equality can be acquired. Consequently, the tree of knowledge is more tempting to her than it is to Adam. Eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge will obviate these failings, “feed at once both Bodie and Mind” (9.779). Adam, perceiving no such lack within himself, is therefore not tempted by the fruit of the tree of knowledge. When he eats the fruit, he does so to avoid the prospect of being permanently separated from Eve.

Satan’s sales pitch to Eve for the tree of knowledge focuses on the qualities with which it will imbue her. When he says, “look on mee, / Mee who have touch’d and tasted, yet both live, / And life more perfet have attaind then Fate / Meant mee, by ventring higher then my Lot” (9.687-90), he directly addresses her fear of remaining as she is, “not circumspect or firm enough,” and not advancing. An increase in knowledge is what will make her “as Gods, / Knowing both Good and Evil as they know” (9.708-9). Eve’s interest in or attempt at Godhead, sinister as it may sound, is merely her effort to find and maintain a degree of autonomy or equality, to achieve a degree of selfhood separate from Adam. She perceives Adam to be godly because of his superiority. Eve’s last unfallen musings, her final thoughts before she eats the fruit are of the promise of the increase in knowledge and verbal ability that the fruit reputedly brings, the keys to her escape from the subjugated status under which she toils. She asks, “In plain then, what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise? / Such prohibitions binde not” (9.753-60). She believes that the prohibitions do not bind her because they are being used to oppress her unjustly. The fruit will remedy “our want” (9.755) and if he “forbids us to be

wise,” he does so unjustly (“Not just, not God”), and therefore she believes that she is free to disobey. Eve, while delighting in the fruit, is excited at the prospect of the increase in knowledge she is about to undergo: “through expectation high / Of knowledg, nor was God-head from her thought” (9.788-90). Eve, having been created “for God in him,” puts Adam on the same level as God. So her perception of Godhead is more what separates her from Adam than what separates Adam from God. Therefore her pursuit of Godhead is really nothing more to her than the pursuit of equality with Adam, not God.

To Eve the promise of Godhead with which Satan has enticed her is what will make her more like Adam and therefore more appealing to Adam. To be more equal is to be more desirable and more free. Eve seeks this equality, this Godhead, not as a boon in its own right, but as a device to make her more appealing to Adam, whose perception of her is always foremost among her concerns. He may not have been her first thought upon tasting of the forbidden fruit, but she thought of him soon thereafter:

But to Adam in what sort  
 Shall I appeer? shall I to him make known  
 As yet my change, and give him to partake  
 Full happiness with mee, or rather not,  
 But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power  
 Without Copartner? so to add what wants  
 In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love,  
 And render me more equal, and perhaps,  
 A thing not undesireable, sometime  
 Superior: for inferior who is free? (9.816-25).

And her thoughts center on what Adam will think. She wonders if she should share the blessing of the fruit with him or withhold it, so as not to surrender her advantage so readily. She believes that the increase in knowledge will make her more lovable, more desirable, more equal, and more free. She equates knowledge with equality and equality with freedom, and because Adam is free and knowledgeable, she equates him with Godhead.

## *Separation*

It is important to establish the motivation behind Eve's separation from Adam because understanding the motivation might serve to determine who was at fault in their fall from grace. During their life in the Eden of *Paradise Lost*, Eve underwent more than two separations from Adam: "Oft he to her his charge of quick returne / Repeated" (9.399-400), but Milton chooses to detail only two of them. Kerrigan and Braden maintain that the motivations for the two separations are different:

Twice in the poem Eve has desired solitude. When she departs from the dinnertime symposium, it is for the sake of erotic delay; Adam will intermix his account with "Grateful digression, and solve high dispute / With conjugal caresses, from his lip / Not words alone pleased her" (8.55-57). But in the next book the motive for her solitude includes some sense of oppressive closeness, "so near each other thus all day" (9.220), some souring on the sweet flirtation of their daytime eroticism. Accomplishment is more to her liking: "Looks intervene and smiles" (9.222). As it turns

out, delay is one thing, absence another. For the absence of Adam gives  
 Eve over to his rival the solitude and singularity of her image. (46)

The two separations had different consequences because the circumstances were different. The first separation from Adam was of little consequence, whereas the consequence of the second separation was more dire, but Eve's reasons for departing are less distinct from one episode of separation to the next than is maintained by these two critics. The idea of accomplishment as her motivation is erroneous, and the narcissistic inclination of which they accuse her is misapplied. Eve did try to use the alibi of "accomplishment" of maintaining the garden as her explanation to Adam for the second separation, but Adam treats it as an obvious pretext, as can be seen from his reaction: "These paths & Bowers doubt not but our joynt hands / Will keep from Wilderness with ease, as wide / As we need walk" (9.244-6). The garden has gotten along fine without the benefit of such careful husbandry in the past, and there is no reason to believe that it is required now. Kerrigan and Braden assert that "the absence of Adam gives Eve over to his rival the solitude and singularity of her image" (46), but when Eve seeks solitude, it not as these critics contend to seek out her image in the reflecting pool. When Eve separated from Adam ostensibly to work unmolested in a corner of the garden, "from her husband's hand her hand / Soft she withdrew; and, like a Wood-Nymph light, / Oread or Dryad, or of Delia's train, / Betook her to the groves" (9.385-8), she betook herself to the groves, not to the water. She is not seeking solitude to look for her own image reflected in the pool of water, but rather she is seeking solitude to improve her self-image which she believes will in turn improve Adam's image of her. Her two-fold reasoning for the two separations is geared toward upgrading her status with Adam.



Eve sees the separation from Adam as a way to increase her appeal to Adam, not to increase her distance from him. The short retirement will give her an opportunity for self-discovery and individuation which will in turn increase her appeal to Adam. As Kerrigan and Braden have implied in using such terms as “oppressive closeness” and “souring” Eve has determined that it is possible to have too much of a good thing and that periodic separation from Adam is a sound practice that may prevent his ardor for her from cooling due to surfeit of exposure: “For solitude sometimes is best societie” (9.249). She believes that she must cultivate her time spent with Adam in order to maintain the interest that he has for her already. Eve’s solitude is not Adam’s rival. Eve’s Solitude is her avenue for self-discovery, not self-admiration. She feels that the more she improves herself, the more appealing Adam will find her: “which for thee / Chiefly I sought, without thee can despise” (9.877-8), and the occasional separation will serve to make their reunions more enjoyable.

As Kerrigan and Braden assert, the sense of “erotic delay” does serve as Eve’s motivation in the first separation, but it plays a stronger part in the second than they imagine. The “erotic delay” of which Kerrigan and Braden speak corresponds to the “sweet returne” that is Eve’s real motivation for both separations. The first separation of Eve from Adam that Milton sees fit to document occurred in Book 8, occasioned by her preference for Adam over Raphael in whose conversation regarding celestial matters Eve was little concerned and in which she was little interested. Eve excuses herself so that she might have the story of their conversation related to her by Adam alone: “she sole Auditress; / Her Husband the Relater she preferr’d” (8.50-1). But her plan comes to naught as Book 8 ends with Adam returning late, “in the thick shade” (8.653) to the

bower with no retelling forthcoming; Eve's ambition unfulfilled. This first separation failed to produce the desired result: "this pure and more inbred desire of joyning to it selfe in conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul (which desire is properly call'd love) is stronger then death" (*Doctrine* 940). The second separation from Adam was Eve's second attempt to accomplish the first goal. Eve's motive for both separations is the same: an opportunity for "sweet returne," made dearer by "short retirement" (9.250). Adam later confirms that desire to be, indeed, "stronger then death" by choosing to eat the fruit at Eve's behest rather than suffer the possibility of being deprived of her sweet converse.

## ***Temptation***

Satan exploits Eve's desire to be more appealing to Adam, but his expert temptation of Eve centers not on appeals to her vanity as has been ordinarily assumed, but on an appeal to her intellect and this desire to individuate her self by increasing her intellectual capacity. He begins by speaking flatteringly about her beauty, "Thy looks, the Heav'n of mildness" (9.530), but he flatters her mind especially, treating her as an individual, as a person of consequence, "Empress of this fair World" (9.568), in and of herself without regard to Adam. She is entranced by Satan's attentions, and "Into the Heart of Eve his words made way" (9.550). But Eve listens more closely and is tempted most surely when the serpent describes the effects of the fruit upon his own intellect: "ere long I might perceive / Strange alteration in me, to degree / Of Reason in my inward Powers, and Speech" (9.598-600). With his blandishments, the serpent mixes in hints of how the fruit will increase Eve's substantiality, make her a person of consequence that

Adam will respect as well as love. The serpent describes to Eve the kind of thoughts that the fruit causes him to have, “Thenceforth to Speculations high or deep / I turnd my thoughts, and with capacious mind / Considerd all things visible in Heav'n, / Or Earth, or Middle, all things fair and good” (9.602-5), thoughts of intellectual substance similar to the content of conversations between Adam and Raphael, even between Adam and God.

Now the serpent has Eve’s undivided attention. She is tempted most strongly by this opportunity for an increase of intellectual substance that presumably will make her converse more satisfying to Adam and obviate the need for him to converse with the likes of Raphael. He incites her lust for knowledge with an onslaught of words rising in a crescendo of ideas each the more tantalizing to her:

O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,  
 Mother of Science, Now I feel thy Power  
 Within me cleere, not onely to discern  
 Things in thir Causes, but to trace the wayes  
 Of highest Agents, deemd however wise. (9.679-83)  
 Queen of this Universe, doe not believe  
 Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die:  
 How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life  
 To Knowledge. (9.684-7)

The promise of the power of the fruit to make causation clear, and to afford an understanding of higher agency, the promise to make abstruse subject matter more plain is what tempts Eve most sorely. Satan hints that she has already been deceived by those whom she had most trusted, Adam and God, and that they had suppressed her by

withholding from her the knowledge that she so craved which would have made her Adam's intellectual equal. He anoints her queen of the universe, even before the fruit with its attendant knowledge of good and evil changes hands, suggesting that this is what she has always been, and that she is by nature entitled to this knowledge that has been hidden from her by trickery and empty threats of dire consequence:

But the coup de grace delivered by Satan, the particular pitch that sells Eve on the fruit and causes her to fall, comes in lines 708-9 when the serpent tells her that: "ye shall be as Gods, / Knowing both good and evil, as they know," this is the temptation that Eve finds irresistible. This is when she falls, at the offer of the chance to be 'as Gods,' Gods who determine their own fate, know the answer to questions of good and evil, go where they want to go, and ask no one for permission:

That whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains  
 Wisdom without their leave? and wherein lies  
 The offence, that man should thus attain to know?  
 What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree  
 Impart against his will, if all be his? (9.724-8)

This is the Godhead that Eve is in pursuit of when she convinces Adam to let her separate from him. This is wherein all the questions about her status and place in the world are for her answered.

Eve is enthralled by these proposals of the serpent who offers to her a supposed source of the qualities, the lack of which she perceives to be the distinction between her and Adam, the perceived inferiority and subordination caused by her lack of the skill of

contemplation. This is Godhead to her. In one of the most-discussed passages of the poem,

though both  
 Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd;  
 For contemplation hee and valour formd,  
 For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,  
 Hee for God only, shee for God in him. (4.295-9)

Eve is described as ‘not equal’ to Adam; demeaned as merely soft and attractive, not a thing of consequence as is the contemplative Adam; a thing not worthy of God’s consideration in her own right, but only as she relates to Adam. To Eve, the fruit offers the opportunity to right these perceived wrongs. By grace of the fruit, she can:

keep the odds of Knowledge in my power  
 Without Copartner? so to add what wants  
 In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love,  
 And render me more equal, and perhaps,  
 A thing not undesireable, sometime  
 Superior: for inferior who is free? (9. 820-5)

She can become a thing more equal by the access to knowledge; sometime superior because she will retain her sweet attractive grace and acquire the additional grace of the power of contemplation. She can if she so desires keep the knowledge to herself, not share it with Adam who seems to have foregone to share it with her; this is real self-determination, free will at last. While she may have been created for Adam, she need no longer be just for God in him, but can be for God in her own right by adding what wants

in the female sex, this power of contemplation. She believes that this quality will more draw Adam's love to her: that she can finally fulfill "Adam's most fervent desire," that Adam will more love a thing sometime superior than the flibbertigibbet that Raphael and God have implied that she is before the fruit is added to her diet.

## ***Conclusion***

To a large extent, *Paradise Lost* revolves around the concept of self-determination or free will, a notion which permeates Milton's life as well as much of his writing. It is a defining factor in his perception of obedience and a determining factor in his personal conduct. Free will determined his choice of religion, his political stance, and his conception of how a marriage should be conducted. In the *Tenure of Kings*, Milton addresses the subject of self-determination and states unequivocally that he considers freedom to be an inborn attribute of mankind: "No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey: and that they liv'd so" (1060). That mankind is born free, intended and created as such by God is to Milton the most basic principle of life on earth. But in *Paradise Lost*, the implications of that free will upon Eve's status as an individual are never fully resolved by Milton. The difficulty arises in the attempt to establish precisely to what degree womankind as a constituent of mankind should and does share in this happy state of self-determination that he describes as an inborn component of mankind, and what limitations are placed upon that self-determination by the seemingly contradictory

subordinate status that Milton's God endorses as a native component of the nature of womankind.

Milton's assertions about the free will of humanity do not correspond precisely with his descriptions regarding Eve and her status as subordinate to Adam. The unqualified self-determination to which Eve should be entitled as a constituent of mankind is called into question when she makes apparently self-determined actions but is not held fully responsible for these actions. Eve, as a rational being, is supposedly created as fully free. If she is indeed fully self-determined, she alone should be responsible for her actions. In blaming Adam in whole or in part for Eve's actions, Milton's God presents him as Eve's superior and caretaker which is inconsistent with her responsibility for her own actions. Milton does more closely approximate free agency and self-determination for womankind than was the popular belief of his day, but he fails to fully resolve that womankind is included in the definition of mankind, thus failing to satisfactorily resolve this problem or its general implications for womankind.

Milton approaches a full participation in the benefits of humanity for womankind, but is unable to bring himself to fully include them due to his apparent desire to maintain their subordinate status. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, while discussing Adam's desires for a mate, Milton refers to the need for "a ready and reviving associate in marriage" (939), and he speaks of a "pure and more inbred desire of joining to it selfe in conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul" (940). Neither the idea of an "associate" nor of "fellowship" can be said to categorically indicate an endorsement of equality between a man and a woman, but it is difficult to imagine words that would more closely approximate such an endorsement. But in *Tetrachordon*, published a year later, he

contradicts that sentiment and makes it clear that equality is not what he has in mind, stating: “Nevertheless man is not to hold her as a servant, but receives her into a part of that empire which God proclaims him to, though not equally, yet largely, as his own image and glory: for it is no small glory to him, that a creature so like him, should be made subject to him” (1030). Milton’s own words in this quotation indicate the gap through which he allows Eve as representative of woman to fall when he uses the phrase “into a *part* [my emphasis] of that empire which God proclaims him to,” indicating that he believes Eve’s constituency in humanity to be only partial, and thus her free will to be limited, and he believes her to be—as a wife—“made subject to him,” her husband.

When contrasted with such phrases as “a fit conversing soul” and “conjugal fellowship” these early writings of Milton’s confirm the impression that this conflicted idea of how the treatment of womankind should proceed was a long-standing concern of Milton’s. His conception of womankind continued to develop throughout his lifetime toward a more enlightened view on the status of women, and by the time he published *Paradise Lost*, his ideas about the subject seemed comparatively highly evolved. Milton’s lifelong fondness and respect for the biblical Eve appears to have been in long-standing conflict with the biblical exegesis of St. Paul who, as a result of God’s judgment against Eve that “he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16), felt that womankind should be treated as subordinate to man. These two opposing sentiments pulled Milton back and forth, and whenever he tended toward a more equitable understanding of the position of women, the Pauline admonition: “*Wives be subject to your husbands as is fit in the Lord, Coloss. 3. 18. In every thing, Eph. 5. 24*” (1030) seemed to pull him back to the old way of thinking.



Throughout much of his writing, Milton evinced an especial fondness for the converse between men and women and averred its crucial importance to the continued happiness of participants in a marriage. His fondness for convivial converse is evident throughout the text of *Paradise Lost*. Demaray recognizes the importance of converse to Milton, as well as the confounding position he takes toward women. “So much hangs on crucial references by John Milton to ‘converse’ and ‘conversation’ in the prose and *Paradise Lost* that the terms, when freshly reassessed, afford unique insight into the vexing issue of Milton’s very individualized views on women, marriage, and divorce” (23). Milton’s views on women are individualized just as are his views on religion, and it is likely the former is a result of the latter. His individual version of Christianity infiltrates his thinking on everything and results in views that are certainly not in close lock-step with others of his time, but at the same time are not necessarily fully consistent within themselves either.

The God and Adam of *Paradise Lost* can be seen to represent the two differentiated sides of Milton’s conflicted attitude toward the free will of Eve, and by extension, womankind. God creates man with free will as a necessary component of his nature: “I formd them free, and free they must remain / . . . I else must change / Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree / Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain’d / Thir freedom” (3.124-8). He wants his creation Adam to have free will, but, having essentially made a gift to him of Eve, Milton’s God is less committed to Eve’s free will and more interested in Eve remaining subordinate to Adam. God seems to be trying to protect that superior status for Adam when He scolds him for listening to Eve’s voice when he should have been hearkening only to God’s. Conversely, Adam seems to think and act as if

Eve's free will is more important to him than her subordinate status. He does not balk at being the superior so much as it appears to interfere with his own agenda which includes his desire to be certain of Eve's unforced love for him. Her status as subordinate interferes with his ability to acquire that information with certitude. Milton's God wants Eve to be subordinate to Adam, but the free will that He claims to have included as an inalterable part of her being and nature as a constituent of humanity interferes with that aim.

As a result of this conflict, God appears to suffer from a lack of foresight. God's promise to Adam that "What next I bring shall please thee, be assr'd, / Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / Thy wish, exactly to thy hearts desire" (8.449-51), does not seem to be fulfilled to the degree that, as a promise of God, it should be. God's creation of Eve as the fulfillment of Adam's wish and exact heart's desire is corrupted by God's desire to fit Eve to His own specifications, as well. The separation scene gives Adam the opportunity to decline to compel Eve even when he has reason, ability, and authority to do so, thus establishing Adam's respect for Eve's right to make her own choices about her autonomy, and that he too, like God, believes in free will: "beyond this had bin force, / And force upon free Will hath here no place" (9.1173-4). This reluctance of Adam's to compel Eve to follow his wishes allows Milton to portray the marriage of Adam and Eve as an ideal one, since "a marriage containing any aspect of compulsion is no marriage according to Milton" (Magro 102). But the ideal marriage does not evidently belong in paradise.

Milton's work to establish free will as an integral part of human nature bears fruit in the Book 9 labor debate and separation scene. It is no exaggeration by Van Nuis to

write “the division of labor debate is thus pivotal within the poem, functioning both prospectively and retrospectively. Inspired by preceding dialogues, it provides the critical, hence deciding (from Gr. *krinein*, "crisis"), moment on which the future of Adam and Eve individually and collaterally depends” (54). The labor debate sets up the respective arguments that Adam and Eve will use to decide upon the separation, but it is the actual separation that is really the pivotal scene in the poem because until the words are translated into the actions that they are intended to justify, they remain only words, abstractions that have little or no meaning without actions to make them concrete. And, as Eve demonstrated upon excusing herself from the conversation between Raphael and Adam, she is not as interested in abstractions as are the other rational creatures in the story. She is more concerned with how these abstractions act upon her, and affect her happiness.

The attempt to illustrate free will serves as Milton’s justification for his alterations of the biblical version of the story of the loss of paradise. Milton must separate the pair to make salient their personal, differentiated responsibility for their actions. To cogently justify the ways of God to man, he needs to establish that the two individuals are responsible for their own actions and therefore deserve their individual punishments. The most effective way to accomplish this goal is to differentiate their actions. If the couple is together at the eating of the fruit, then the areas of responsibility are blurred. As separate actors, they establish themselves as separate entities with distinct responsibilities. The separation allows Eve to actually exercise her autonomy and free will in a substantive manner, and to realize the consequences of that exercise as brought about by a reasonable and just God. Eve’s separation from Adam gives Milton the opportunity to establish

Eve's *bona fides* as a free agent, and to show her as individually responsible for her own actions and deserving of her separate punishment.

The separation of Adam and Eve also provides Eve with the impetus to differentiate herself from Adam which is chief among her ambitions. Eve separates from Adam in an attempt to individuate herself from him, to establish that she has an identity separate from him, with meaning and value of its own, as well as opinions and values of her own that are not necessarily drawn from Adam's and are not necessarily in agreement with his. Van Nuis avers that "by literally separating herself from Adam's presence, she also takes the leap first to become a differentiated self" (54). The separation scene affords Eve the opportunity to "make triall of herself," to individuate herself as an entity separate from Adam, and not as merely a part of him. This Evian enterprise is given the somewhat distracting label of the pursuit of Godhead which undeservedly tinctures Eve with a blasphemous flavor. James Stone argues that "from Eve's point of view, only by severing herself from Adam can she assure herself of a female identity that is not simply identical to Adam's male identity" (36-7). Before Eve is individuated from Adam, it is possible to perceive them as a single entity of a single (perhaps indistinguishable) sex (hence one flesh, perhaps). If she is a part of Adam, she can not be beloved of him because she is of him; being constantly at his side renders Eve indistinguishable from himself in Adam's eyes; he becomes unable to imagine himself separate from Eve, and unable to think of her as separate from himself. For Eve, individuation is a way to separate herself from Adam and to consequently bring them closer. By separating from Adam, Eve is cultivating her relationship to Adam in much the same way she has proposed to cultivate their garden: rather than allowing it to overgrow, wild and unfettered, she is husbanding her relation

with her husband. As she sees it, by being occasionally absent, she is seeing to it that Adam is able to rue her absence occasionally, and thereby rejoice in her return. The separation gives Eve the opportunity to achieve a degree of individuation that would otherwise have been unavailable to her, to separate herself from Adam both literally and figuratively.

Adam in turn must allow Eve to leave his side to provide her with the opportunity to return to his side voluntarily, thus confirming that she wished to be there all along, and casting aside any suspicion he may have had that their connection is by “forc’t yoke.” While separated, Eve is able to assay her virtue as well as her love for Adam, and to prove her love to Adam upon her return. Because she makes a choice that is contrary to his wishes, and because that choice leads to an actual physical separation of the couple, Eve’s separation from Adam supplies the only genuine incontrovertible evidence of Eve’s free will. Free will is choice; it is the presence of options with the option to choose among them. If Eve is never permitted to leave Adam’s side, or even if she never wishes or asks to, she can not be considered a free agent, and therefore can not be held responsible for her actions; she would truly therefore be Adam’s subordinate and thus his responsibility. Separation confirms the voluntary nature of Eve’s presence. Voluntariness too is choice, the option to do or not do. According to Revard,

Eve herself has argued (ix.322-41) that if she and Adam are compelled to remain inseparable, “in narrow circuit straitn’d by a Foe,” that they possess neither happiness nor liberty. Happiness cannot exist without liberty and liberty can function only if man and woman are permitted independently to affirm “Faith Love, Virtue” by trial. (73).

If Eve is not given the chance to exercise that liberty, to establish her identity as separate from Adam's, she can not then affirm that faith, love, and liberty to Adam or even to herself, and Adam can then never be certain that she remains with him out of a real desire to do so, rather than lack of any opportunity to do otherwise. Happiness, like responsibility, cannot rightly exist in the absence of liberty. Voluntariness is the harbinger and partner of free will and is necessary for Milton's conception of marriage. Without the liberty to do otherwise, Eve can never be certain that her free will is anything but lip service nor can she be certain in her own mind of why she stays. For Adam to be happy, Eve must be happy. To be sure that Eve is happy, Adam must be convinced of the voluntary nature of her presence, therefore he must give her liberty; he must permit her to separate from him.

Satan's success as tempter is reliant not on his appeal to Eve's vanity, but to her desire for Godhead, which is really a desire to improve her situation. Like the accusation of uxoriousness against Adam, accusations of vanity, inconstancy, and concupiscence frequently attend Eve, and have been oft-blamed for Satan's success as a seducer. But vanity for Eve is not an end in itself. It is a means to maintain her appeal. Throughout her existence, it has been made clear to her that the chief quality that she has to offer is her beauty. The vanity of which she is so often accused is merely her absorption of what she has been told about her worth and attempting to use it to her best advantage. The ideals of equality, free will, and individuation, are what appeal to Eve, and not as tools to escape or surpass Adam, but to bring herself closer to him, and he to her.

Responsibility and free will are the real subject matter of *Paradise Lost*. We are told in the first sentence of the argument to the first book of "the whole Subject, Mans

disobedience,” but that disobedience serves to illustrate that man has free will to obey or disobey, and that he alone is responsible for which he chooses: “Man is the occasion of his owne miseries.” The separation of Adam and Eve allows Milton to show the manifold ways in which free will is important to Adam and Eve in particular and to humanity in general, to hold Adam and Eve individually responsible for their actions, and to illustrate the responsibility that free will entails. Adam is responsible for allowing Eve to withdraw her hand from his, for valuing Eve’s autonomy above the directive to obey God above all else. Eve’s responsibility lies in her suit for autonomy, which she saw as her way to improved status with regard to her husband, thus putting her marriage above the edict to obey God. Both are responsible not one more than the other because they both committed the same sin of eating the fruit in spite of the edict not to do so. So while the epic voice blames Adam for uxoriousness and blames Eve for failing to brook restraint, these are not the real sins. Adam and Eve’s sin was that they each valued their marriage to one another more highly than they did their obligation to God. The sin for both Adam and Eve was disobedience pure and simple. They disobeyed God’s edict that they worship Him above all else. Milton’s sin is in his failure to fully realize the implications of his equating self-determination with humanity and the consequences this had for the status of womankind as either subordinate or not according to his God’s plan.

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